T.B.
NOONAN & CO.
PUBLISHERS
BOOK-SELLERS
& IMPORTERS
OF
RELIGIOUS ARTICLES
17, 19 & 21
BOYLSTON ST
BOSTON.

Rev. P. M. O'Connor.

~~BT 34~~

HP

BT

Quarterly Series

FIFTY-FOURTH VOLUME

THE THIRTY YEARS

ROEHAMPTON

PRINTED BY JAMES STANLEY

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

THE LIFE OF OUR LIFE

PART THE FIRST

VOL. III

Life of our life, v.7

THE THIRTY YEARS

OUR LORD'S INFANCY AND HIDDEN LIFE

BY

HENRY JAMES COLERIDGE

OF THE SOCIETY OF JESUS

W 75

LONDON

BURNS AND OATES

GRANVILLE MANSIONS W

1885

BOSTON COLLEGE LIBRARY
CHESTNUT HILL, MASS.

B T310
.C65x

98011

✠

O JESU MITIS
ET VERÆ PATIENTIÆ FORMA
ET VIRTUTIS EXEMPLUM
REPELLE A ME OMNES FASTUS SUPERBIÆ
CUNCTOSQUE APPETITUS INANIS GLORIÆ
OMNIA SIMUL GENERA
TANTÆ PESTIS TANTÆQUE MALITIÆ
NON SIT DOMINE
NEQUE VIDERI POSSIT
TANTÆ PERDITIONIS SIGNUM
IN SERVO TUO
NEQUE IN MORIBUS MEIS
NEQUE IN VERBIS NEQUE IN FACTIS
NEQUE CORAM TE IN COGITATIONIBUS MEIS
FUNDA ME
IN VERA ET PROFUNDA HUMILITATE
ET NULLUS IN ME PATEAT LOCUS
INIMICORUM INSIDIIS
ET PRÆSTA
UT SIM PARVULUS IN OCULIS MEIS
QUATENUS PLENAM GRATIAM INVENIAM
IN OCULIS TUÆ MAJESTATIS
AMEN

(*Ex Ludolpho*)

PREFACE.

No one can either put forth, or read through, a volume like the present, in which we endeavour to give an account of all that has been revealed to us concerning the Thirty Years of our Lord's existence on earth which preceded His Public Ministry, without being struck with astonishment at the small bulk of the materials on which that account must be founded. It is here indeed that we find the most convincing proof of the truth that the revelations of God to us must be measured, not by the multitude of words in which they are conveyed, but by the importance of the matters of which they speak. Our Lord Himself, in the course of His teaching, laid down His doctrines concerning the most vital points of His work in the fewest possible words, as when He spoke of the Blessed Sacrament, the Adorable Sacrifice, the Priesthood, the Power of Absolution, and the like. The treatises of Catholic theologians on these and other points are long indeed in comparison with our Lord's own utterances, and yet they are not too long for our instruction. The Evangelists have been guided to a silence, or, when

they do speak, to a brevity on the subjects treated of in this volume, and others like them, which may remind us of the extreme fewness of our Lord's own words on such important matters, and of the wonderful pregnancy of the few words which He did give to them.

These remarks apply most fully to that most wonderful portion of our Lord's sojourn on earth which we commonly call the Hidden Life. It is with regard to that long period that we are most tempted to let our human and inadequate ideas of the virtue and power of the interior life of prayer and communion with God for the carrying on of His work in the world, to make us feel impatient of what seems inaction at a time when action was, according to our poor judgments, most needed. We forget that even in His Public Ministry there were periods of retirement and silence, at all events periods of which we have but little account to give. If we look to the commentary on the Life of our Lord which is supplied to us in the lives of the Saints, we shall find but few, even of the most active workers and preachers, who have not had their activity thus broken up. The most fruitful activity in the sight of God is the activity of prayer. The greatest spiritual work in the sight of God is the work of bringing souls, already very high in His favour, to a still greater perfection, a still more

exquisite purity, a still more intense charity, and endowing them thereby with a still greater might in the participation of what St. Paul calls the "powers of the world to come" for the benefit of others. We learn the great dignity of the Apostles from the manner in which our Lord gave Himself up to their training at the very time that He was in the midst of His Public Ministry. We may learn, in the same way, the importance in His sight of the bringing to the utmost perfection the magnificent work of God in the souls of Mary and Joseph, from the length of time during which this was His chief and chosen occupation.

For the rest, the external course of the Hidden Life was probably as uniform and same as is that of the lives of good religious in some peaceful house of prayer and contemplation. I have endeavoured, very shortly, to point out the relations which exist between the Life at Nazareth and the various phases and conditions of common life of the great mass of Christians. If this principle be admitted, we seem to have an immense treasure of instruction, even in the few general features which we alone find drawn for us by the Evangelist of the Hidden Life. And most certainly, if we are not fit for further knowledge until we have mastered the necessary lessons conveyed to us by the Hidden Life as we already know it, we have no right to be impatient,

as if St. Luke had not told us enough and more than enough to occupy our minds and hearts, and guide our whole lives.

The present volume completes the first part of the Life of our Lord, and thus supplies a deficiency in the whole work as far as it has as yet gone. I have therefore a special reason for gratitude in being allowed to complete it. The remaining portions of the whole work will now, I trust, appear regularly and without undue delay, if it should please God to allow me health and strength to accomplish them. I take this opportunity of renewing my thanks to many kind friends, to whose prayers I have already owed much, and shall, I hope, owe much more.

H. J. C.

31, Farm Street, Berkeley Square.
Feast of the Presentation of our Blessed Lady, 1885.

(*The reader may as well be warned that the references made throughout the volumes of this work to the Latin Harmony published many years ago, called "Vita Vitæ Nostræ," which is now out of print, may be verified in the English version, lately published under the name of the "Story of the Gospels." The "Vita Vitæ Nostræ" cannot probably be reprinted for some time*).

CONTENTS.

PAGE

PREFACE . . ix—xii

CHAPTER I.

The Nativity of our Lord.

St. Luke i. 6, 7; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 8.

St. Luke's narrative . 1
Concourse at Bethlehem . 2
Opportunity of hospitality 2
The Cave . . . 3
Time for the Birth fulfilled 4
Childbirth in the state of innocence . . . 5
Our Lady's immunities . 5
Virginity in Childbearing 6
Manner of the Birth . 7
Her intense joy . . 8
Contemplation of St. Bridget. 9
Mary's perpetual virginity 11
Fruitfulness of the doctrine 12
Theological reasons. . 13
Teaching of Suarez. . 15
Example of our Blessed Lady 16
Importance of the truth . 17
"Her first-born" . . 18
New life of Mary and Joseph 19

PAGE

Circumstances chosen by God 20
Intelligence of Mary and Joseph . . . 21
Sympathy and suffering . 22
Our Lord's work of expiation 23
Perfection of His faculties 24
Experimental knowledge . 25

CHAPTER II.

The Angels and the Shepherds.

St. Luke ii. 8—20; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 9.

Our Lord's legitimate rights 27
Worship of the Angels . 28
Subject of their probation 28
Joy of their adoration . 29
Their canticle . . . 29
Mary and Joseph aware of their presence . . 30
Other worshippers . . 31
God's choices in this respect 32
The Shepherds . . 33
Scene of the apparition . 34
Words of the Angel. . 35
The sign 37
The multitude of Angels . 38

	PAGE
Division of the *Gloria in Excelsis*	38
Their love for the Incarnation	39
"Peace to men"	40
With God	40
With one another	41
The "good pleasure" of God	42
Meaning of the Greek word	43
Use by St. Paul	44
The words of the Church	45
The *Gloria* and the *Magnificat*	46
Vocation of the Gentiles	47
Departure of the Angels	48
The Shepherds at the Cave	49
Spread of the news	50
Reasons for the arrangement	51
Christian contemplation	52
Honour to Mary and Joseph	53

CHAPTER III.

Our Lord in the Crib.

St. Luke ii. 19; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 9.

Our Lady's contemplation	54
Manner of her guidance	55
Her characteristic	55
Revelations of common life	56
Its dignity and grandeur	56
Our Lord as teacher	57
Contemplation of the Divine attributes	58
Glory for our Lord's humiliation	59
Power of God	60
Liberality of God	61
Faithfulness of God	62
Justice and mercy of God	63
Virtues pleasing to God	64
Poverty	65
Humility	66
Hiddenness	66
Other examples of humility	67
Contempt of worldly honour	68
Patience and mortification	69
Obedience	70
Love for God and man	71
Teaching from the Saints around the Crib	72

CHAPTER IV.

The Circumcision.

St. Luke ii. 21; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 10.

The head of a family	75
Position of St. Joseph	76
His choices	77
Was our Lord subject to the Law?	78
Instincts of St. Joseph	79
Full knowledge about our Lord	79
The words of the Angel	80
Place of the Circumcision	81
The Sacred Rite	
Circumcision given to Abraham	83
Its effects	83
What it symbolized	84

PAGE

Reasons why our Lord should be circumcised . 84
Fulfilment of the Law . 85
Importance of the mystery 86
Shedding of the Precious Blood 87
Faithfulness to our Lord 87
Significance of the Circumcision . . . 88
Moral signification . . 89
Giving of the Holy Name 90
Significance of names in God's Kingdom . . 92
Anticipations of our Lord's office 93
Meaning of the Name in Him 93
Our Lord revealing the Father 94
Power of the Holy Name 96
Its invocation by the faithful 97
St. Bernardine of Siena . 98
His treatise on the Holy Name 99
First part . . . 99
Second part . . . 101
Third part . . . 105
Pregnancy of God's works 106
The Holy Name in the Holy Family . . 107

CHAPTER V.

The Purification.

St. Luke ii. 22—39; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 11.

After the Circumcision . 109
Law of Purification . . 110
And of the Redemption of the First-born . . 110

PAGE

Reasons for these obligations 111
They did not apply in this case . . . 111
Reason of the Law . . 113
Not applicable to our Lord and His Mother 114
Divine reason for its fulfilment 115
Virtues of our Lady . 115
Great joy 116
Joy in Christian privileges 117
Absence of outward pomp 118
Prophetic descriptions . 119
Our Lady's offering . . 120

CHAPTER VI.

The Canticle of Simeon.

St. Luke ii. 25—32; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 11.

Honour provided for our Lord by God . . . 122
Presence of Simeon . . 123
Who he may have been . 123
His character . . . 124
"The consolation of Israel" 125
The Holy Ghost with him 126
Promise made to him . 127
Devout persons in the Temple 12
A considerable party in Jerusalem . . . 129
Simeon and our Lord . 130
His Canticle . . . 131
"The salvation of God" . 132
The revelation of the Gentiles . . . 133
Prophecy of Aggeus . 134

	PAGE
Implied promise of grace	134
Wonder of our Lady and St. Joseph	135
Meaning of the Evangelist	137

CHAPTER VII.

The Prophecy of Simeon.

St. Luke ii. 34, 35; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 11.

Providential arrangement of incidents	138
Simeon sent to prophecy sorrow	139
Our Lord's coming in prophecy	140
Words of Malachias	141
Communication of the Passion to our Lady	142
Fitness of her prevision of the Passion	142
Glory to God from this	143
Foundation of her office	144
Words of Simeon	144
Our Lord "set" for falls and resurrections	145
For each in a different way	146
Scandal of many in Israel	145
Our Lord and the Jews	145
Others to rise again	147
Alternative issues in our state of probation	148
"A sign to be contradicted"	149
The sword to pierce Mary's heart	151
Test of men's thoughts	152
Change of joy into sorrow	154
Sudden revelation to Simeon	155
Prophets "knowing in part"	156
Change in our Lady	157
Nothing said to St. Joseph	158
Sufferings before this	159
Designs of God	159
The "Mother of Sorrows"	160
Not overwhelmed	161
A more than martyrdom	161
Her great fortitude	162
Great advance in grace	162
The prophetess Anna	163
Like the holy Judith	163
A class of devout women	164
Prayer for the advent of the Messias	165
Reward of perseverance	166
Anna and our Lord	167
Connection of mysteries	167
Return to Nazareth	169

CHAPTER VIII.

Nazareth and Bethlehem.

St. Luke ii. 39; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 11.

Account of the two Evangelists distinct	171
St. Matthew's purpose	172
Mysteries in St. Luke	173
Arrangement of the history	173
When did the Epiphany take place?	174
The two alternatives	175
Answer to difficulties	177
Omissions in each account	179
The Purification should precede the Epiphany	179

PAGE

St. Joseph's reasons for returning to Bethlehem 181
The natural place for our Lord's home . . 182

CHAPTER IX.

The Star in the East.

St. Matt. ii. 1—12; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 12.

Questions as to dates . 183
Birth of our Lord unknown in Jerusalem . 184
Appearance of the Magi . 185
Scanty information about them 186
State of the Jewish people 187
Question of the Magi . 188
The prophecy of Balaam . 188
Study of the heavens . 189
Spiritual gifts of the Magi 190
Representing the Gentile Churches . . . 191
Narrow conceptions as to God's provisions . . 191
Conversion and faith . 192
The later centuries . . 192
State of the East . . 192
Witness to God among the heathen . . . 194
The Apostles and the vocation of the Gentiles 195
St. Matthew and the Magi 196
The Jewish Church at the end of time . . . 196
Work of the Gentile Church 196
Magnificence at the Epiphany 197
The Gentiles rousing the Jews 198

PAGE

God's dealings with different classes . . 199
He deals with the Magi through the visible creation . . . 200
The Gentiles to go first into the Church . . 202
Times of the appearance of the Star . . . 202
The most probable explanation . . . 203
The place whence they came 203
Length of their journey . 204
Reappearence of the Star 205
Alarm caused to Herod . 206
And to the priests . . 207
Rome hostile to national movements . . . 208
Herod and the priests working for God . . 209
Want of true policy in Herod 209
The priests hardened . 210

CHAPTER X.

The Epiphany.

St. Matt. ii. 1—12; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 12.

Simplicity of the Princes 212
They leave Jerusalem . 213
Interview with Herod . 214
Providence of God . . 214
The Magi without curiosity 215
The Star again seen . 216
Their great joy . . 217
Their footsteps guided . 218
They find our Lord and His Mother . . . 219

PAGE

St. Matthew and the prophecies 220
No mention of St. Joseph 221
Reasons for this . . 222
The adoration of the Princes 223
Meaning of the mystery . 224
Revelation of God . . 225
Instruction to the Angels 226
Display of power . . 227
Holiness 228
Faithfulness . . . 229
Glory to our Lord . . 230
Graces of the Princes . 231
Courage and faith . . 232
Interior intelligence . 233
The first pilgrims . . 233
Visits to the Blessed Sacrament . . . 235
Our Lord and the Magi . 235
Spiritual blessings . . 236
Joy of our Lord . . 237

CHAPTER XI.

Persecution.

St. Matt. ii. 12—14; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, §§ 12, 13.

The Cross now to be expected 240
Strangeness of the mysteries of the Infancy . 241
The Divine Purpose . 241
Circumstances of our Lord's coming . . 242
Discipline of persecution 243
Prevision of persecution . 244
God does not interfere violently . . . 244
Diabolical influence in persecution . . . 245

PAGE

Apparent success . . 247
Charity sometimes lost, if not faith . . . 247
The faithful left to ordinary means . . . 249
Persecutions are chastisements 249
Healing power . . 250
Virtues exercised in the Flight 251
Ordinary sufferings hallowed 251
The exile remaining . 252
Chastisement of persecutors 253
Persecution and the Flight 254

CHAPTER XII.

The Flight into Egypt.

St. Matt. ii. 13—15; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 14.

Dream of the Wise Princes 256
Different modes of enlightening them . . 257
God's use of dreams . 257
Sometimes to several persons at a time . 258
Departure of the Princes 258
And of the Holy Family . 259
Reasons for the selection of Egypt . . . 259
The Jews in Egypt . . 260
State of the country . 261
Dangers of the Flight . 262
Anger of Herod . . 263
Various traditions . . 264
The idols falling . . 265
Words of Isaias taken literally . . . 263

PAGE

CHAPTER XIII.

The Holy Innocents.

St. Matt. ii. 16—23; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 13.

The murder of the children 267
Probable number . . 268
Strangeness of the Providential order . . 269
The Church and the Innocents . . . 269
Passage of the Apocalypse 270
Case of the Innocents . 271
They died for our Lord . 271
Language of St. John how applied to them . . 272
Answer of some theologians 273
Reasonableness of the theory 274
They were "first-fruits" 275
Another explanation . 276
God's munificence in the New Kingdom . . 277
Growth of intelligence of His ways in the Church 278
The three kinds of martyrdom 279
Numbers of sufferers under the protection of Holy Innocents . . 280
God's value for martyrdom 281

CHAPTER XIV.

The Return from Egypt.

St. Matt. ii. 19—23; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 14.

Character of Herod . . 282
His great success . . 283
List of his victims . . 283
Other features in his character . . . 285
He probably thought little of this murder . . 286
Account of his death, from Josephus . . 287
Duration of the exile . 288
Our Lord's occupation . 289
Delight in reliance on Providence . . . 290
The death of Herod . 291
Joy of the people . . 291
The Angel's directions to St. Joseph . . . 292
Something left to his prudence 293
His inclination for Bethlehem 294
Fear of Archelaus . . 295
Divine reasons for residence at Nazareth . 296
Our Lord to be called a Nazarene . . . 297
St. Matthew and the prophecies 298

CHAPTER XV.

Fulfilment of Prophecy.

St. Matt. ii. 1—23; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, §§ 12—14.

St. Matthew's rule in omissions . . . 299
Incidents which might be inserted . . . 300
His delight in prophetic illustration . . . 300
His references here . . 301
Prophecy of Micheas . 301

PAGE

"Out of Egypt I have called My Son" . . 302
Explanation . . . 302
Passage from Jeremias . 304
The weeping of Rachel . 305
Prevision of Jeremias . 306
The prophecy messianic . 306
St. Matthew's method . 307
Prophecy about Nazareth 308
Different interpretations . 309
Nazareth a contemptible place 310
Interpretation from Isaias 311
Antiquity of this interpretation . . . 312
The two interpretations united 313

CHAPTER XVI.

The Hidden Life.

St. Luke ii. 40—52; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 15.

Silence of the Evangelists 314
Materials not wanting . 315
Work of our Lord hitherto 316
Bethlehem and Jerusalem 316
In Egypt 317
Our Lord always working . , . . 318
Obscurity at Nazareth . 318
Consecration of poverty . 319
Immense extent of this Kingdom . . . 320
The religious life and the Holy Infancy . . 321
The Christian Home . 321
Society founded on it . 322
Extent of His Kingdom . 323

PAGE

Attacks on the Christian home 323
Consecration of childhood 324
And of labour . . . 325
Evils of slavery . . 325
St. Paul's example . . 326
Effects of our Lord's passage through the world 327
Summary of the Hidden Life 328

CHAPTER XVII.

Our Lord at Jerusalem.

St. Luke ii. 41—50; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 15.

Incident of the stay in Jerusalem . . . 330
Jewish custom of pilgrimage 331
Our Lord's going up . 332
Age of twelve . . . 333
Manner of the pilgrimage 334
Contemplation on the story 335
Multitudes at Jerusalem . 336
Our Lord in the Temple . 336
He remains behind . . 337
Alarm of our Lady . . 338
Among the Doctors . . 339
The Jewish Schools . 339
Subject of the questions . 340
Importance of the Catechism 341
The Catechism in the Church 342
Wonder of our Lady . 343
New manifestations . . 344
Her question . . . 345

PAGE

CHAPTER XVIII.

"The things of My Father."

St. Luke ii. 49, 50; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 15.

The account in St. Luke from our Lady . . 347
Occupations of our Lord 348
His work for the Schools 349
The words ambiguous in the Greek . . . 350
Our Lord and His Father's will 351
Difficulty remaining . 352
Sorrows of our Lady most profitable . . . 353
Parental authority limited 353
Example of our Lord . 354
Earthly parents and children 355
Other incidents like this . 356
Our Lord's words and acts 357
Fruitfulness of this example 358
What was not understood 359
The explanation in the future 360

CHAPTER XIX.

Subjection and Growth.

St. Luke ii. 50—52; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 15.

Close of the account of the Hidden Life . . . 362
The three statements . 363
No change of plan . . 364
Behests of the Father paramount . . . 364

PAGE

A further meaning . . 365
Our Lord's subjection commanded . . . 366
Our Lady's pondering . 367
Wonderfulness of the mystery . . . 368
Divine purpose . . 368
Importance of obedience. 369
Increase in wisdom and grace 371
Theological truth . . 371
Interpretation of St. Gregory of Nazianzus . 371
Doctrine of the schoolmen 372
Experimental knowledge 373
Opinion of Toletus . . 375
Language of the passage . 375
Religious vocations . . 376
Fruitfulness of obedience 377

CHAPTER XX.

The Death of St. Joseph.

Fulness of teaching in the Hidden Life . . 379
No mention of sickness and death . . . 380
Divine use of death . 381
An example needed . . 382
Not from our Lord Himself 383
Mutual love of Mary and Joseph 383
Our Lord the bond between them . . . 383
Our Lord and St. Joseph 384
Account of Maria de Agreda . . . 385
Illnesses of St. Joseph . 386

	PAGE
Last farewell . . .	387
St. Joseph's death a martyrdom . . .	388
St. Bernardine's reasons .	388
Extreme tenderness of St. Joseph . . .	389
Our Lady's privilege ,	390
Arrangement of her life .	391
And of that of St. Joseph	392
His many offices . .	393
Especial patron of the dying	394
His death-bed . .	395
Hopes for our own deaths	396
NOTE A.—*The Brethren of our Lord* . . .	398

Harmony of the Gospels.

	PAGE
§ 8. The Nativity of our Lord	401
§ 9. The Shepherds .	401
§ 10. The Circumcision .	403
§ 11. The Purification of our Lady and the Revelation of the Child Jesus	403
§ 12. The Wise Kings .	404
§ 13. The Flight into Egypt and the Massacre of the Innocents .	406
§ 14. The Return from Egypt	406
§ 15. The Child Jesus remains in Jerusalem .	407

CHAPTER I.

THE NATIVITY OF OUR LORD.

St. Luke i. 6, 7; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 8.

THE simple narrative of the Gospel of St. Luke tells us in the fewest possible words the circumstances of the Nativity. "It came to pass, when they were there," at Bethlehem, "her days were accomplished that she should be delivered. And she brought forth her first-born Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." That is all that we are told of the mystery which fulfilled the expectation of heaven and earth, and on which the contemplations of devout souls are never weary of feeding themselves. Tradition hands on but little to fill up the picture for us. Though it has carefully preserved the spot in which the Nativity took place, it has added but little to the incidents and surroundings of this great mystery.

The town itself was not large. The Prophet Micheas speaks of it as if it might have been altogether insignificant, but for the unique distinction which it was to possess as the birthplace of the Messias. It had its traditional greatness in the remote past, for it was known all over the Holy Land as the city of

David, and there must have been many sites in its neighbourhood connected with the history of this greatest of the heroes of Israel. At the moment of the visit of St. Joseph and our Blessed Lady it had put on perhaps an air of unusual activity, and it would be remembered at the time of the enrolment that it was in this sense the royal city. It would not require a very great concourse of strangers to fill up the little khan to which those who had no friends with whom to seek for hospitality would naturally betake themselves. But it is very probable that the occasion was one when there was some strain on the resources of the small community, though it is not certain that all who had to be enrolled were to present themselves on the same day. There must have been some bustle and excitement in the narrow streets, and as the night fell in that wintry season of the year, there may have been more than one party of new-comers who had to contend for lodging in the khan.

St. Joseph and our Lady were certain to retire and give way to others. Perhaps even if he had acquaintances or relatives in the town, he did not choose, or had not time, to hunt them out and beg for shelter. It is always the case with occasions of charity, for one that is declined or directly refused, there are a dozen others that are missed because they are not looked for. No one can doubt that there must have been, even in that small town, and at such a time as that of the enrolment, not a few houses with empty rooms in which the Holy Family might gladly have taken refuge, if refuge had been offered them. There may have been not a few good

persons, who would not have turned away from their door that gracious maiden, so soon to be a mother, with her gentle, humble, and soft-spoken spouse. If such persons had been on the look out for an occasion of charity, certainly they might have found it, by going out to the gate or into the street. And then they might have been the hosts of the new-born God and of the Queen of Angels. But it was the will of God that had ordained all the circumstances of the entrance of His Son into the world, which He was to redeem, and He was to come to His own and His own were not to receive Him. A little indolence, a little thoughtlessness, a reluctance to exert themselves on an occasion when a high reward might have been reaped, brought down on the people of Bethlehem the unenviable distinction of being the first of the human race to fulfil these words. The one title of their town to fame was their connection with David, and the King, the Son of David, was turned from their doors. The far greater distinction which had been promised to Bethlehem was that it should be the birthplace of the Incarnate God, and when He came to them, He could find no one to give Him shelter. "He came unto His own, and His own did not receive Him."

It is not likely that St. Joseph spent a long time in seeking for hospitality. He was told of a cave in the hillside near the end of the town, which may have had some little tenement in front of it, as is so often the case in that country, and there he took shelter and prepared for our Lady's passing the night. The legend about the ox and the ass in the stable

may have been founded on the words of one of the prophets,[1] but it is very likely that St. Joseph had with him these animals, the one for our Blessed Lady to ride on, and the other that he might sell it in case of any emergent need. As the night drew on, as it appears, our Lady became aware that the time of her delivery was nigh at hand. She made her simple preparations with the few cloths she had brought with her from Nazareth.

"Her days were accomplished that she should be delivered." The words, which come to us so immediately from our Blessed Lady herself, seem to imply that she was fully aware beforehand of the appointed time. She could not have missed a single day of that sacred time during which the Incarnate God had been carried in her womb. She had looked forward to His Birth with the most intense desire. Happy and blessed indeed had been the days of the nine months, but yet, with all their happiness, they had left her something more to long for, not with the common yearning of mothers to see a man born into the world, but with the intense desire which belonged to the Divine Maternity, that the Saviour and King should come forth and begin His work and His reign.

Some of the Fathers tell us that, if the state of innocence had continued, the conception of children, which is now accompanied, more or less, by the indulgence and excitement of concupiscence, would have been entirely free therefrom, and that, in the same way, the pangs and even dangers of childbirth would have been altogether

[1] Isaias i. 3.

absent. It is only natural to think this. Our Blessed Lady had conceived, not only with the most perfect innocence, without inheriting the stain of the Fall, and entirely without concupiscence, but in a manner of her own, which could never have place in any other, because she conceived as a perfect and unsullied Virgin, and not only without any communication with man, but by the most sanctifying operation of the Holy Ghost Himself. Thus her conception was altogether elevated, even above what might have been the common lot of the daughters of Eve if the first parents of mankind had not fallen. It is only therefore a part of her privilege in her childbirth that she should not have been subject to any of the pains or labour which are now the common lot of mothers, as indeed she had carried our Blessed Lord in her womb without any of the sufferings or inconveniences which belong now to the condition of maternity. The language of St. Luke seems almost intended to bear a silent witness to this truth, when he says of her that she wrapped her Son in the swaddling clothes and laid Him in the manger, implying that there was no weakness or faintness about her, and that she neither needed nor permitted the help of any one else in all that was required for the service of her Son when He was born.

The tradition of the Church goes further than this perfect and absolute immunity of the Mother of God from the usual penalties of the Fall in this matter. For it has always been believed in the Church concerning our Blessed Lady, as she had conceived in a miraculous manner and without

carnal delight or concupiscence, so also did she bring forth her Divine Son without any loss at all of her Virginal integrity, remaining a perfect and inviolate Virgin after the birth of her Child as before. This truth seems to be included in the direct prediction of Isaias, of which we have more than once spoken. For he says that the Virgin shall conceive and also bear a Son, and there would not be the entire accomplishment of such words in the case before us, if there were not to be Virginity in the Childbirth as well as in the Conception of the Child. And the same may be said of the words of the Catholic Creed, in which it is said that our Lord is "born of the Virgin Mary." This seems to be in part the reason why the first Evangelist takes so much pains to assure his readers that St. Joseph exactly obeyed the injunction of the Angel, or the command implied in the words of the Angel, who had quoted to him the passage of the Prophet to which we have referred. St. Joseph preserved our Lady altogether untouched during the space of time before her Childbirth and after her Conception. If this is inserted in the Sacred Text in order that we may be certain of the perfect accomplishment of the prophecy in this respect, it seems to follow that the words of the prediction involve the truth of which we speak, that is, that the act of Childbirth was accomplished in our Blessed Lady without any detriment to her perfect integrity as a Virgin. Thus the truth of which we are speaking may be said to rest on the direct testimony of the Word of God.

It is, moreover, certain that this is the perpetual tradition of the Church, and that whenever, from

time to time, the heretics who have anticipated the low ideas of the Protestants of modern Europe concerning our Lord and His Blessed Mother, have uttered their thoughts on this point, they have been met by a chorus of reprobation from the Fathers and the faithful in general, just as Nestorius was met by an universal outcry when he broached his heresy concerning our Lady and the Incarnation. The passages of the Fathers may be found in such theologians as Suarez or Trombelli, and it may safely be said that this is a doctrine as to which the common sense and feeling of the Church is even more powerful and conclusive than her dogmatic utterances. There are various ways in which the actual process of the birth of our Lord from His Mother's womb may be explained in accordance with this doctrine. But, where we have to do with a miraculous birth in which the Omnipotence of God must have been exerted to produce the result, it does not seem worth while in a work like the present to enter on such questions. The common belief is sufficiently expressed by saying that our Lord passed out of His Mother's womb as He passed into the chamber in which the disciples were assembled after the Resurrection, or as He passed out of the Holy Sepulchre to rise from the dead, as a ray of light passes through the clear glass or crystal. What the Catholic Church has always felt is that our Blessed Lady's privilege secured her from the slightest infringement of her matchless integrity, and she is content to leave the explanation of the manner of this privilege to the power of God.

It is also a common contemplation among the Christian writers that she gave birth to our Lord, not only without the pain and labour which are usual among the daughters of Eve, but with the utmost and most intense joy. It seems only natural that, as her Childbearing was the joy of Heaven and Earth, it should be the same to her whose spotless purity and unexampled grace were the instruments of that glorious Birth. No one could understand as she could understand, the wonders of the Divine counsels which were being accomplished in the Nativity of her Son. No one but she could rise to the comprehension of the unutterable condescension of God in making Himself a creature, and in choosing the nature of man to be united to His own Majesty. No one but Mary could appreciate the dignity of Him Who thus abased Himself, or the infinite glories that were to follow on that abasement, its fruits in time and in eternity to the honour of God and the blessing of His creation. The joy of the heart of Mary during the nine months which were now ending, must have been indeed truly heavenly, and now she was raised to a fresh height of exultation and delight in the accomplishment of her work, as the living shrine of the Incarnate God, and in the beginning of a new work, as we may well call it, the work of being the nurse and guardian of His years of infancy and childhood. It is not wonderful that the intense and divine joy of her heart and soul should overflow on her body itself, which had for so long been the temple of the Divinity, now that she was to see His Face and clasp Him to her heart, and perform for Him the

loving services of the Mother of His helplessness and dependence. He was all and entirely her own, her Child and the Child of no one but her. Her incomparable graces made her capable of a love worthy of its object and of her own dignity, and the shock of joy, which no nature but hers could have borne, came upon her in its fulness, a calm peaceful flood of delight, such as is not felt even by the brightest of the inhabitants of Heaven.

The circumstances of this marvellous Childbearing are the favourite subject of the contemplations of the saints. Among the many descriptions which may be found of them, we may select a part of that which is given us in the *Revelations of St. Bridget*,[2] though it must be remembered here also that visions of this sort may be very considerably coloured by the mind to which they are addressed. But the minds and imaginations of the saints are tinged with the hues of Heaven, and thus, even humanly speaking, they may present us with pictures on which we may feed both with delight and safety. In one of her Revelations, St. Bridget describes what she saw herself while at Bethlehem, though she does not claim for her description any supernatural authority. First she describes the entrance of our Lady and St. Joseph into the cave. Our Lady is most beautiful, clothed in a white mantle, with a thin tunic underneath it, through which her flesh could be seen. This is clearly for the purpose of the description, for in no other way could the Saint describe all that she has to describe. St. Joseph ties up the ox and the ass to the manger, he lights

[2] St. Birgitta, *Rev.* vii. 22.

a candle for the Blessed Mother, which he fastens against the wall, and then withdraws. Our Lady takes off her sandals and lays aside her mantle and the veil which covered her head, and her fair hair falls in long golden waves over her shoulders. She then brings out some small cloths of linen and woollen material, very fine and clean, which she had prepared for the Child Who was about to be born. She kneels down with great reverence and begins her prayer, her back being towards the manger, and her face looking to the East. Her eyes and hands are raised towards Heaven. She remains thus as if rapt in an ecstasy of Divine contemplation, and then in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, her Son is born.

He lies on the earth. An ineffable light pours forth from Him, entirely eclipsing the other light, and it is all so sudden and instantaneous that the Saint cannot tell how it had come about. Only she sees Him there in a moment, an Infant lying on the ground, radiant with brightness, and all His limbs most pure and without the slightest stain. She hears the most beautiful chantings of the Angels, full of wonderful sweetness and melody. As soon as our Lady saw that she had borne her Child, she bows her head, puts her hands together, and with great reverence and dignity adores Him, bidding Him welcome, as her God, her Lord, and her Son. The Child lies weeping and trembling as with cold and from the hardness of the earth on which He lay, and He moves a little, and seems to stretch His limbs as if in search of some repose, some cherishing shelter from His Mother, who then takes Him in her arms,

and presses Him to her heart, and warms Him at her breast and with her cheek, with immense joy and most tender compassion. Then she sits herself down on the earth, and takes Him into her lap, proceeding to wrap Him round with her cloths, first the linen and then the woollen, binding His limbs with the fastenings which hung from the corners of the cloths. Lastly she wraps up His Head in the cloths she had ready for that purpose. Then St. Joseph comes and prostrates himself before the Child, weeping for joy. The Saint sees in our Lady no mark of weakness, no change of colour, or anything else of the kind, which is common in other women at such times. At the end our Lady rises up with the Child in her arms, and she and St. Joseph place Him in the manger, adoring Him with immense delight and joy.

The privilege of the Virginal Childbearing has always been considered in the Church as the foundation of the perpetual Virginity which is ascribed to Mary during the whole of her life. This again appears to rest on an universal tradition. The reasons for this belief are so plain, the truth approves itself so clearly to the simple Christian instinct of reverence to our Lord, that it is not easy to imagine that those who deny or question it can really believe that He is the Son of God. The truth is thought by many of the Christian writers to be set forth in the passage in the Prophet Ezechiel, where it is said of the gate of the Temple "this gate shall be shut and no man shall pass through it, because the Lord the God of Israel hath passed thereby."[3] The language is metaphorical,

3 Ezechiel xliv. 2.

but it seems to belong to no one so naturally as to our Blessed Lady. A further argument from Scripture is found in the history of the Annunciation, that is in our Lady's own words to the Angel, "How shall this be done, seeing that I know not man?" If these words convey a peremptory reason why our Blessed Lady, before she was the Mother of God, should not be able to conceive a child in the ordinary way, it must be certain, with a still higher degree of certainty, that there was in her condition, with reference to this matter, a still more peremptory reason against the possibility of any conception on her part at a later period. If our Lady was bound by a solemn obligation to God to remain a Virgin at the time of the Annunciation, it is certainly incredible to suppose that such an obligation did not exist afterwards. It might indeed have occurred to a devout mind, that, if it could have been possible in the counsels of God that our Lord might have been born of one who was not the purest of Virgins, at least after that Divine Birth His Mother must have remained intact. But to imagine that His Mother had been at the time of the Annunciation consecrated to God by a vow of perpetual virginity, and that this vow was to be violated after the Birth of the Incarnate Son of God, is to imagine something altogether inconsistent alike with reverence to Him and a due estimate of her transcendent virtues.

This doctrine of the perpetual Virginity of the Blessed Mother of God has been so fruitful of good in the Church and in the world, that it may be worth our while to dwell a little on the theological

reasons which are assigned to it by the great Christian writers. It is not that there can be any doubt of the truth in any mind that has learnt to think rightly concerning our Lord and His Blessed Mother. All that has hitherto been said concerning her wonderful elevation in the order of grace must be forgotten, before any idea of this kind can enter the mind except to be rejected with indignation and disgust, except in so far as it may be the fruit of an ignorant opinion, founded on a mistaken interpretation of the Scriptures, of which we shall speak separately.[4] The reasons to which we refer are to be found in the *Summa* of St. Thomas, set forth in his wonderfully concise and pregnant manner, and the devout commentator Suarez has added one more of his own.[5] St. Thomas simply takes the persons concerned in the execution of the mystery of the Incarnation, and shows in a few words how indecent and incongruous it would have been for them if the Helvidian slander had been true. Our Lord Himself is the Only-begotten of His Father, Who pours out in His Eternal Generation the whole, so to say, of His Paternity. He communicates to His Son His whole substance, and makes Him the complete and perfect expression of His own Infinite Being. It would have been indecent and unfitting if He had been but one of many children of any earthly mother, sharing with them her maternal fertility, her care and love, which could belong after Him to no other. On

4 See Note A at the end of this volume.

5 St. Thomas, part iii., q. 28, art. 5; Suarez, *De Mysteriis Vitæ Christi*, disp, v. § 4.

the part of the Holy Ghost, by Whose operation our Blessed Lady had become the Mother of her Divine Child, it would have been unbecoming in the highest degree if she whom He had made His own sanctuary for the production and nurture of the Sacred Humanity, had afterwards been touched by any other. No profanation of a material temple, or of any sacred vessel which had been consecrated to the holiest purposes, could be equal in indecency to this.

Moreover the Blessed Mother herself, even putting aside her Virgin consecration of herself, would have shown both incontinence and ingratitude for the highest favours ever bestowed on a created being, if she had sacrificed that Virginity which had been preserved by a special miracle, and allowed the chamber in which Christ had been conceived and fostered to suffer pollution. There is the same indecency to be supposed under this hypothesis in the blessed Joseph. We have seen that he is spoken of in the Gospels as one of singular justice, purity, and reverence. We have seen how the knowledge of the Divine Conception, which had taken placé in the womb of his most beloved bride, filled him with so much of holy awe, that he was thinking of leaving her side, rather than intrude himself as her husband into the following out of the great mystery of the Incarnation. It is certainly most fitting and most reasonable to think that, after the marvellous birth had taken place he would have been at least as full of reverence for Mary as before. And besides, we have seen that he shared, from the very time of their marriage, if not

before, the holy purpose of continence in the married state which she had been the first to conceive.

These are the reasons given by the Angelical Doctor for the truth which, as has been seen, rests primarily on the words of Sacred Scripture and on the tenderest and noblest instincts of the Christian heart, as expressed in the tradition of the Church. The great commentator Suarez adds another of his own, to the value of which every age of the history of the Kingdom of our Lord bears witness. Suarez says that it was becoming that the counsel of virginity should be most perfectly observed, not only by our Lord, but by His Mother, that she might be the perfect example of that heavenly virtue to all the virgins of the Gospel. Something of this sort has been already touched on in the former volume, in which the prerogatives of the Blessed Virgin have been spoken of. The history of the Christian age bears abundant witness to the truth, that one of the most precious achievements of the Church upon earth has been the raising, so to say, of the standard of holy Virginity. It is an achievement against which the world, the sensuality of man, and the hatred of Hell to all that specially honours God and benefits mankind, rage most furiously. It cost the Church the labour of centuries to establish in the world around her the honour of woman and the Divine principle of the unity and indissolubility of marriage.

The Catholic Church accomplished this victory mainly by setting on high in honour the principle of chastity, continence, virginity. It is this principle that

has furnished her altars and sanctuaries with the holy line of her priests, which has filled her cloisters and sent forth her armies of devoted souls to labour in the vast field of charity to their neighbour or of missionary work among the heathen. All the great works which she has initiated and established, all that has been so marvellously fruitful of glory to God and of blessing to men in the way of works of piety, self-sacrifice, learning, zeal, and the like, has been the work of the "chaste generation" of which the Catholic Church has been so prolific. But on no single point of the history of the Incarnation can we fasten more securely as being the point from which all these blessings and glories flow, the fact in which their principle and essence are embodied, as on the perpetual Virginity of the Mother of God. It is this that makes the doctrine of which we are speaking so important, not simply for the honour of our Lord and His Blessed Mother, but for the regeneration and elevation of human society.

It is most true, as Suarez implies, that this holy principle is found in its perfection in the life of our Lord Himself. No one without deliberate blasphemy could think of Him otherwise than as the purest of the pure. But the Sacred Humanity, united to the Divine Person of the Eternal Son of God, might be thought to be too far above us to be the model of our imitation in this respect. It might have been thought that the following of Him in His Virginity was at least held out only to those who share His Priesthood, administer at His altars, who preach His Word, and are the Pastors of His flock. But the example of Mary has opened this beautiful path

of Holy Virginity to the weaker sex as well as to the stronger, and to the whole Christian people as well as to the priests of the Church. The food of virgins is the Sacred Humanity itself, taken from the most pure flesh of Mary and imparted to all in Holy Communion. Her Virginity is the natural condition, it may also be said, of the execution of the Incarnation, but it has moreover lit up the whole world which the Incarnation has created anew and elevated to Heaven. If we could imagine it otherwise, if the Helvidian account were true, it would be difficult to see how the fruits of the Incarnation could have been what they have been in the regeneration of the society of men.

There is thus more than meets the mind at first sight, in this reason for the truth of which we are speaking which has been added by Suarez. It is easy also to understand how this truth has been made the constant object of assault by the powers of Hell, especially when they have been labouring to subvert the influence of the Church and of our Lord in the world. It is clear enough that, if the statements which occur in the New Testament concerning this subject are fairly and impartially examined, they must serve to vindicate the truth before us, although the truth was too well known and too axiomatic, in the days of the earliest Christian writers, to have been founded on any such examination. Notwithstanding the plain witness of the New Testament, there have seldom been wanting, especially since the rise of Protestantism and the consequent progress of the restoration of Paganism in the world, abundance of critics who have exerted

all their ingenuity to persuade themselves and others that this truth is an invention of mistaken piety and reverence, and to support their foregone conclusion by arguments which are contradictory to the simplest canons of their own art. For the craving of man for sensual indulgence is invincible. It may be conquered by the truth and graces of the Gospel Kingdom in one generation after another, but it is always rooted in the degenerate mind and heart, always ready to put forth new shoots, and to claim again its ancient dominion over the world. Never has it been more active in its efforts to sway legislation in its own favour than in the times in which we live, in which we have seen the licence of divorce and the abolition of the sacredness of the state of matrimony introduced into more than one land calling itself not only Christian but Catholic. A divorce law once passed, and it takes but a few years to familiarize the people with the old Pagan view of the marriage tie. In the system of the Church, it is the religious consecration of purity which supports the sanctity of marriage, and secures the existence of the Christian home. It is the honour of virginity that makes marriage honourable, and holy, and indissoluble, not simply by the command of God, but by the enlightened, intelligent, and purified feelings of men, and of this consecration the one great model, and pattern, and mother, and defender, is the Immaculate Mother of God, ever a Virgin.

"She brought forth her Son, the first-born." He is called her first-born, because so He was in truth, though there could be no other after Him, the first-

born of the whole creation, the first-born among the innumerable children of God whom He was to make such by their faith in Him. He is the only-begotten Son of the Eternal Father, for in the Divine Nature there can be no more than one Son. He is the first-born in His Human Nature, the first-born of His Blessed Mother, for there could be no one before Him as there was no one after Him, and He left her spotless and inviolate, and so she was ever to remain. His first place of rest in this world was in her loving arms, which received Him as He came forth, or in which He was, as some say, laid by the holy angels who waited around. Then "she wrapped Him in swaddling clothes," for she had no need of help or service, who had borne Him without pain or weakness, "and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." The hillside which His hands had made, and no human habitation, gave Him the hospitality which men denied to Him, and the animals for whom the manger had been made were, in that sense, His first hosts. Mary made His birth known at once to the blessed Joseph, and the two were the first of all creatures to adore the new-born God. And then began that new life of Mary and Joseph of which we have spoken. She fed the Infant Saviour with the milk of her breasts, she tended Him with the utmost care, while her holy Spouse watched over them both and supplied all their wants. Here, then, we have another stage in the immense and continual growth of Mary and Joseph in sanctity. Every onward step in the history of the Incarnation was the occasion of a

fresh outpouring of grace on each for the discharge of their new office.

It is needless to say that every one of the circumstances of this entrance of our Lord into the world was deliberately chosen by God for purposes of His own. As He had guided the policy and the decree of the distant Emperor, and the actions of all the officials through whom the Imperial purpose passed, before it could reach the point at which it became, to Joseph and Mary, the manifestation of the Divine will, so also He had arranged that there should be the crowd at Bethlehem, that the khan should be full, and all the concurrent incidents of the night which ended in the resort of the holy pair to the cave. The obscurity, the discomfort, the poverty, the suffering, the helplessness, the loneliness, the insignificance, the ignominy, and other similar circumstances which formed the welcome received by our Saviour on His first appearance among mankind, all were chosen by God rather than any other possible circumstances, as the most appropriate and most honourable to Him, in consideration of the work which He came into the world to do. No honour which the world could have offered Him, no display of wealth, no magnificence of attendance or reception, no palace of gold and ivory, crowded with nobles to wait on Him, and Kings and Queens to provide Him with every luxury and comfort, could have been so suitable to Him on His entrance into the human world as the surroundings which welcomed Him in this cave, the home of animals rather than of men.

In this most sacred cave, the Providence of His

Father was His furnisher and His host, the Holy Angels, His Blessed Mother, and St. Joseph were His courtiers and attendants, and nothing was offered Him for His wants or His service that had on it the stamp or stain of worldly greatness, the loathsomeness of pride, the foulness which in the eyes of Heaven attaches itself to all that can minister to concupiscence. The poverty, the humiliation, the mortification, for the love of which it may almost be said He would have come down from Heaven, were here to greet Him with all their fragrance and Divine beauty. The adoring sympathy which these circumstances called forth from His Mother and her holy Spouse, rose like the most costly incense around His manger-bed, in union with the adoration of the whole host of Heaven. For He began His reign on earth with a great act of humiliation, in which He indulged to the utmost the darling passion of His Sacred Heart. Then, as was always the case, in accordance with the law of which He Himself was so often to speak, "that whoso humbleth himself shall be exalted," the Eternal Father took care that His first moments of abjection and humiliation should not be left unhonoured by the purest and simplest souls of earth and by the homage of the angelic choirs.

We may return hereafter to the consideration of the circumstances under which it was the decree of God that His Son should be born into the world. For the present it is enough to say how obvious it must be that our Lady and St. Joseph must have fully understood the Divine counsels which were thus executed, and have been ready to adore these

counsels with all due submission, admiration, and joy, even though it could not but be with a most tender sympathy and compassion for the sufferings which thus formed so large a part of the welcome of the Blessed Babe into His new Kingdom. Thus their share of the Cross begins with the entrance of our Lord into the world. The keen suffering which they must thus have felt, and the perfect resignation with which it was endured, formed a part of the Providential service which they were to render to the Infant Lord of all. Mary and Joseph could take in all the wonderful truths contained in these mysteries, as completely as they have ever been comprehended by the highest of the angels, and far more fully than they have been explained by the most enlightened theologians of the Church. They could see in all these things illustrations both of the office of the new King, and of the spirit and scope of the new Kingdom. They were the first and the most intelligent of the thousands of contemplatives of the ways of God, to whom the Church was to give birth. All the exercises and flights of this heavenly wisdom are summed up for us in the few simple words of St. Luke: "Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart." We may be sure that the thoughts of Joseph resembled most closely and faithfully the thoughts of Mary. At the same time the blessed foster-father was already beginning to feel the weight of his own peculiar cross. For it was his office to be the provider and manager of the Holy Family, and every detail of hardship and suffering fell upon him thus with a double pang.

We are thus led to see, with these blessed saints, how the circumstances under which our Blessed Lord chose to come into the world of men, the conditions of poverty, humiliation, and suffering which surrounded Him at once in the cradle in the cave, were all arranged beforehand in His Providence for the more perfect discharge of His twofold work, the work of expiation and satisfaction, and the work of instruction and revelation of the truth. Thus, in their rejection, as it seemed, by the inhabitants of Bethlehem, the holy pair could see the first working of the great principle which was to be conspicuously characteristic of His treatment at the hands of men. It is the rule for the greatest blessings to occasion the deepest ingratitude. They would see in the poverty and mortification of the manger and the home in the cave which He chose for Himself, the first reading to the world of the lesson of the vanity and the peril of riches and comforts, His burning desire at once to begin with this instruction, as well as with the atonement which He was to make for the many sins to which the love of comfort and wealth and honour have given occasion, and for the many shortcomings in the service of God of which the same love was to be the cause. Nothing could be more unseemly, from a merely human point of view, than that the Lord of all the world should come into it in such a manner, instead of being received at once by the offering of all that the world had to give Him in these respects. But, from the heavenly point of view, it would have been far more unseemly, as has been said, if He had accepted the conditions of wealth, honour, luxury, comfort, splen-

dour, in which an earthly Prince might have been born. All these conditions were worthless in themselves, at the best. But, moreover, they were stained by the blood of souls whom they had ruined, by the dishonour of God, and the injury of man with which they had been connected. They might suit the child of Augustus or of Herod, they were altogether loathsome in the eyes of the Redeemer of the world.

It must always be remembered—and we are never more likely to forget it than in our contemplations of the first Christmas at Bethlehem—that He Who appears to us a helpless Babe, silently weeping for the hardships of this His first welcome into the world, was, as ever, perfect God, and perfect Man, in the full possession and exercise of His intelligence and other human faculties, as well as of the attributes of His Godhead. This truth was not hidden from Mary and Joseph, and it gave an increase of deep reverence and awe to their ministrations, at the same time that it added fresh tenderness to their love and devotion. In order to understand perfectly, even according to our capacities of intelligence, the scene in the cave, we must endeavour to give to ourselves some account of the interior acts of our Lord on His entrance in the world which He came to redeem. It was now that He made a fresh offering of Himself to His Eternal Father, a renewal of that oblation which had been made when He entered the world of creation at the moment of the Incarnation. It was now that He submitted Himself anew to the will of His Father as the rule of His life, and that He welcomed anew the special work of redemption and enlightenment

for which He had been sent, and which He now began.

But there was now something more than a continuation of the Life which He had hitherto led in the womb of Mary. For now He began for the first time His experimental knowledge of the circumstances of the human life which He had taken to Himself, and which was to remain the same in character to the end of the thirty-three years. Before this He had known perfectly, by the Divine knowledge which was His, and by the knowledge of human things which belonged to His Human Soul, all the characteristics of the condition on which He was now entering. But now He began to learn, as St. Paul says of Him, "obedience from the things which He suffered," and this would make Him take to His Heart with an especial love all the circumstances of poverty, affliction, privation, mortification, and pain, which He had deliberately chosen for Himself in the arrangement of His birth in His Divine wisdom. Burning with zeal for the glory of His Father, and for the welfare of the race whom He had made His brethren, He accepted with immense thankfulness and joy these sufferings which were to Him the promise and the prelude of the Cross. And if Mary turned to Him with a boundless increase of delight, now that she was able to see His Face and clasp Him to her heart, He also would condescend most deliberately and most lovingly to all the endearments which belonged to His state of Infancy, and receive with intense gratitude the ministries of His Mother, and of the very dear Saint who was to be to Him as a Father. He rejoiced to be able to show them the

tenderness of His love and the completeness of His obedience, while His Heart overflowed also with immense compassion for all mankind, and delighted in that sanctification of poverty and lowliness and dishonour, which resulted from the fact that He had now touched them in His own Sacred Person.

BOSTON COLLEGE LIBRARY
CHESTNUT HILL, MASS.

CHAPTER II.

THE ANGELS AND THE SHEPHERDS.

St. Luke ii. 8—20; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 9.

If there was a natural fitness in the circumstances under which our Lord was born into the world, that fitness was limited, as it may be said, to His reception by the world of human society, and to the conditions of temporal discomfort and humiliation which He chose to take up. Nothing that man had done or could do in the way of folly, as to the value and use of temporal things, could make our Lord other than the Master and Sovereign of the whole created universe. It was true that the consequences of the Fall had issued in a complete perversion of judgment among mankind as to what were the true goods. But this could not alter the natural and legitimate position of the Incarnate Son of God in the world which He had made. Earth, or at least mankind, might reject Him, but the creation as such must acknowledge Him and adore Him. All through His Life, whenever our Lord is exposed to some special humiliation, and does not defend Himself, the Providence of His Father interferes and raises up witnesses to His honour. Thus it might have naturally been expected,

that when men rejected Him and dishonoured Him, as was the case when they allowed Him to be born in a cave and a stable, God would provide that due homage should be done nevertheless to His dignity and majesty. Thus, when the first worship had been rendered to Him by the two most highly graced souls in the world, by Mary and by Joseph, the angels were sent in multitudes from Heaven to honour their new-born King. These were the first visitants to the cave of the Nativity.

It is a familiar contemplation with some of the Fathers and the great Christian writers, that the fall of the angels was occasioned by an act of pride and rebellion on their part, and that the service to which they were too proud to submit themselves was the enjoined adoration of the Son of God in an inferior nature to their own, that is, in the nature of Man. We have spoken of this more than once. Something of this kind seems to be contained in the words which St. Paul quotes in the opening chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, where he says, "When He bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, He saith, 'And let all the angels of God adore Him.'"[1] It is thought that the revelation of the future Incarnation was made to the angels, and that their trial consisted in this, whether they would humble themselves or not to the adoration of Him Who was at once the Son of God and the Son of Man. On this revelation, Lucifer and those who fell rebelled against the command of God, while St. Michael and the remainder of the blessed and faithful angels most joyously and readily submitted themselves.

[1] Heb. i. 6; Psalm xcvi. 7.

If this be so, then the Nativity of our Lord may well have been the point of time determined through all eternity for the execution of this act of homage to our Lord on the part of the angels. And the multitudes of those blessed spirits, who visited Bethlehem at this time, must have rejoiced with a most especial joy, because of the relation of the great mystery, now actually accomplished, to the trial of their own faithfulness, their success in which had been the immediate cause of their own confirmation in grace and of the securing of their own thrones in Heaven for ever. If it was the punishment of the rebellious pride of Satan and others, that they, on the other hand, lost for ever the blessedness which the others made secure by their humility, it was also the decree of God that the thrones thus made empty in Heaven should be filled anew by the children of that inferior nature which He was to take on Himself. We have found this thought of the rejection of the angels for their pride, and of the exaltation of the inferior race of men in their place, dominant in the *Magnificat* of our Blessed Lady, and, as she was so marvellously enlightened in her intelligence of these Divine mysteries, we may shelter ourselves under her mantle in regarding this adoration of the First-born in Bethlehem in the light here mentioned.

Moreover, the same thought seems to be suggested by the words of the angels themselves, as they were heard singing by the shepherds after the message of salvation had been delivered to these last by one of the heavenly host. "Glory to God in the highest," that is, in the highest heavens,

"and on earth peace to men of good will," or "of the good will." The adoration which they had paid to the new-born Child was the adoration due to God and paid to Him in the highest heavens, nothing short of that, the same worship which is for ever rendered at the footstool of the Most Blessed Trinity. Again, the Incarnation which was now accomplished was connected with the rendering of that worship by the angels in Heaven. For it had been the acknowledgment of that mystery which had secured to the angels the privilege of paying that homage for ever. And again, the Incarnation was to bring about a new glory to God in Heaven, inasmuch as the Sacred Humanity was to be for ever there after the Ascension. Now, the great office of our Lord in His Human Nature was to be the summing up and ennobling and, so to say, deifying the praises and worship of the whole creation, spiritual and material, by presenting it in union with His own. And the vacant seats were to be filled up, and so what was wanting, so to speak, of the glory of God in the Highest, was to be supplied by those who, by virtue of the Incarnation, were to be raised from among the children of men to be the companions of the angels themselves.

The homage paid by the angels to the Incarnate Son of God can hardly have been hidden from the knowledge of Mary and Joseph. We are not told of it directly in the Gospels, perhaps because it did not belong to the human history of the Incarnation. Thus St. Luke, or the writer whom he followed, under the guidance of our Blessed Lady, passes on at once to the appearance of the angel to the shep-

herds. But that apparition, which was necessary for the information of the shepherds, was of a single angel only, and when the message had been delivered, that angel was joined by a "multitude of the heavenly host," who were present with him, evidently, not simply for the sake of enlightening the shepherds. But if those simple peasants were thus allowed to be witnesses of the presence of a large number of angels for the purpose of adoring our Lord, it is not easy to think that the presence of these heavenly worshippers was hidden from the Mother of our Lord herself or from her holy Spouse. Moreover, as they had been the witnesses of that humiliation of our Lord which consisted in His rejection by the people of Bethlehem, it is only in harmony with the manner of God's action, in constantly restoring His honour when it has been disregarded, that they also should have the consolation of witnessing the adoration paid to Him by the blessed citizens of Heaven. Instead of the inhabitants of the city of David, He had as His adorers the whole heavenly host.

But the worship of the new-born King was not to be confined to Mary, and Joseph, and the blessed angels sent to Him by His Father. It was only right that mankind should join in the honour paid to the Saviour of the world in His deep humiliation, and that some at least of the holy nation should be deputed to render to Him that special homage and thanksgiving which was due from His chosen kindred of the race of Abraham and Israel. Who were these to be? It might have seemed most becoming to the dignity of the Infant King that the present

holder of the sceptre should be brought to worship Him in His cradle, or at least that the High Priest with some of his compeers of the family of Aaron should do Him homage. The priestly race had already paid Him some honour, in the persons of St. John the Baptist and his father Zachary. But the Chief Priests at Jerusalem were not worthy of Him. And, at all events, their witness to the fulfilment of prophecy as to the place of His Birth was to be officially given at a later period, both to Herod and to the Wise Kings from the East, and it might have impaired their credit if they had already been summoned, by a vision of angels, to the cave at Bethlehem, even if there had been those among them who would have closed with the invitation.

All through the history of the Church there is a class of facts which reappears from time to time, and with which we are as familiar in the nineteenth century as our forefathers in earlier ages. The class of facts of which we speak is that of occasional manifestations of the power of God, or the commission given to His saints, in connection with certain spots, or shrines, or devotions, or of His will that special honours should be paid to Him, or to the Blessed Virgin, or some of the saints, in some new form or manner. The Church celebrates some of these in her universal Calendar, as when she keeps the feast of the Apparition of St. Michael, or that of the founders of the Trinitarian Order, or of the Order of our Lady of Ransom. But there are many more which are of local celebration, although honoured all over the world, such as the giving of the Rosary, or the great Indulgence of the Portiuncula, or the

Scapular, or, to speak of our own times, the appearances of our Blessed Lady at La Salette and at Lourdes. In almost all such cases the persons selected by God, as the first recipients of the message which is, practically, sent to the whole Church, have been simple, humble souls, high, perhaps, in sanctity, though this is not always required, but in the eyes of the world altogether lacking in position and in influence. It seems to be the will of God that, in these manifestations, the law of which St. Paul speaks, when he glories in the infirmities and human weaknesses of the ministers of the great mysteries and sacraments, should have its place, that it may be manifest to all that what is brought about in consequence of the Divine communication is the work of God and not the work of man. There is the same phenomenon in the introduction of some of the great devotions of later times, as that of the Blessed Sacrament, or the Holy Infancy, or the Sacred Heart. The human instruments were weak, humble, religious women, whose work is nevertheless to write itself in the annals of the Catholic Church. We may see the working of this law in the choice now made by God of the first human visitors to the shrine of the Nativity.

"And there were in the same country shepherds watching and keeping the night-watches over their flock. And behold, an Angel of the Lord stood by them, and the brightness of God shone upon them, and they feared with a great fear. And the Angel said to them, Fear not, for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all the people. For this day is born to you a Saviour Who is Christ

the Lord, in the city of David. And this shall be a sign unto you, you shall find the Infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. And suddenly there was with the Angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will. And it came to pass that, after the angels departed from them into Heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us go over to Bethlehem, and let us see this word that is come to pass, which the Lord hath showed to us. And they came with haste, and they found Mary and Joseph, and the Infant lying in a manger. And seeing, they understood of the word that had been spoken to them concerning this Child. And all they that heard wondered, and at those things that were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them."

The traditional site of this scene is at a distance of a mile or two from Bethlehem, and there can be no reason for doubting the correctness of the tradition. The number of these blessed shepherds appears to have been small, perhaps three or four. The appearance of the Angel might be expected to be of exceeding brightness, shining through the gloom of the night, and it may have been increased in order to produce a greater impression on the simple shepherds, and make it easier for them to believe the Divine message. But, as has been said before, the visions of angels, and all communications from the unseen world, are always, in our present

condition, productive of fear to man, and thus the first effect on the shepherds of this most merciful and loving communication was, that they were stricken with a great fear. But the angels, when they address themselves to souls at peace with God, are able to calm the fear which their presence at first inspires, and thus the Angel spoke on this occasion, as to Zachary and others, in words which conveyed a heavenly peace and confidence, and took away all alarm. First of all he bade them "Fear not." Then he added the reasons why they were not to fear. "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all the people." The joy, therefore, was very great which was announced. It was a joy not for themselves alone, but for all the people. It was a message of joy of which they were to be the first recipients, highly favoured therefore and honoured in their lowliness and obscurity before all others who might have been chosen for its reception. Though the joy was to spread over all the nation, still there was no delay, it was communicated to them at once. The news which was the burthen of this happy message was the birth of a Saviour. No temporal or passing deliverance, therefore, but true and real spiritual salvation, the one great need of that people and of all the world, which lay in a condition of death and bondage to sin and Satan, and had no power at all of self-deliverance, nor indeed any hope, barely the desire, which could not but remain as long as men could be conscious of their own utter degradation and misery.

This Saviour, the Angel tells them, is born to them. He is theirs, therefore, their own, and they

are the first to be told of the blessed truth of His coming. But it was not simply His coming or presence that the Angel announced to these shepherds, it was His Birth. He was therefore come as a Child of their own race and nation, their line and neighbourhood, raising mankind in general, but the seed of Abraham and house of David in particular, to an elevation among the creatures of God which gave them a place altogether unequalled, raising them even above the Angels themselves, almost as if he had said, "He is born to you, not to us." And all this wonderful blessing is now fresh and new, it has come about this very day, and it has, moreover, not come about at a distance, it has happened in your own close neighbourhood, in the city of David, here at hand. And by this announcement, again, the blessed Angel sent their minds back to the old prophecies, both as to the royal line of David, and as to the Birth of the promised Messias in Bethlehem, prophecies which were not likely to be unknown even to these simple shepherds of the country. And the crown and overwhelming wonder of this great blessing is that which is conveyed in the last words, which imply the Incarnation of the Son of God. For the Saviour Who is born to you in the city of David, is indeed the Son of David, but He is also Christ the Lord, that is, He is the Incarnate God. It is no prince of the royal line alone who is born, it is no deliverer of the people from their temporal enemies and oppressors, such as had been sent from time to time in the history of the holy nation, and had passed away, it is no prophet or saint alone, who is born to you, but the Christ, in Whom all

the prophecies are fulfilled, the Lord of heaven and earth, of angels as well as of men.

"And this shall be a sign to you, you shall find the Infant wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger." The words of the Angel suppose, though he had given them no distinct command, that they would go at once and see the Blessed Child. Thus he gives them a sign by which they are to know Him. He is to be found wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger, that is, in a state and condition which certainly could not be expected in the case of so great and marvellous a Child. He was not to be looked for, then, in the dwellings of the great or the rich, or the people of authority, the officials of the Government, or even among the ministers of the synagogue, to whose abodes the simple shepherds would have found it difficult to obtain access at such a time. Nor are there to be crowds of worshippers and courtiers thronging the place where He is lying, that their presence may exclude yours. This, surely, will be sign enough, that you have been warned of a truth so marvellous, and you will know the Babe when you see Him by these simple circumstances of His poverty and destitution. The sign was to be, that they would find a Child such as the words describe, on their arrival at Bethlehem, or just inside Bethlehem, and by their finding a Child in such conditions they would know, not only that the Angel's words were true, but that that very Child was the Saviour of Whom the Angel spoke.

But there was to be a stronger confirmation of the words of the Angel, for, up to this time, only

one of the heavenly host had been manifested to the shepherds, in order, perhaps, not to frighten them too much by the splendour of the vision. But now, "Suddenly there was with the Angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will." The holy angels, then, had gone in multitudes to adore the new-born King, and now it was the will of God that these humble shepherds should have the entrancing joy of hearing their devout songs of praise and witnessing the marvellous beauty and majesty of their visible presence. And the words which they heard have gone on floating in the atmosphere of this lower world ever since. The Holy Church has made them her own, and drawn out in her own divine way the meaning of the strain which the Angels began.

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will." Thus there are two divisions of this angelical hymn. In the first, glory is given to God in the highest, that is, in the highest heavens, and in the second He is praised for the peace which is given upon earth to men of good will. The Most High had humbled Himself and emptied Himself in a manner beyond all thought or parallel or precedent, and it was right, that in the very highest heavens glory should be given to Him for all the display of His marvellous attributes, His power, His holiness, His mercy, and the rest, which had resulted from the execution of the great counsel of His wisdom and love. The Incarnation had been a fresh revelation of God to the blessed inhabitants of Heaven, and it was fit and meet that they should

break out in consequence into this fresh hymn of glory, and that it should be, in this degree and measure, communicated to men, who were the special objects of His love and wisdom and condescension. And so, though the highest heavens are for ever ringing with the praises of the angelic choirs for all the manifestations of Himself on the part of God to them, it was right that now that He had manifested Himself in a new and surpassing way, fresh glory should be given to Him in proportion to the fresh manifestation of His goodness. So there is, on account of this wonder which has now been wrought, fresh glory to God in the highest.

But it must again be remembered that the Incarnation, as has so often been said, was not only a new revelation to the holy Angels of the general goodness and power of God. It was also the mystery on which their perseverance and faithfulness to God had been put to the test beforehand, and it was therefore the consummation of their own probation, it was the ground of their victory, the occasion of their triumph, when so many others of the first princes of the Kingdom of Heaven had failed in their duty. Thus it was in an inexpressible degree dear to them for their own sakes as well as for the sake of mankind. The strain of rejoicing glorification of God which now bursts from their lips had been sounding in their hearts since the moment when the mystery of the humiliation of the Eternal Son had been proposed to them, and when in their own faithfulness and humility they had offered their ready and loving homage to Him, Who was now manifested to the world as the Child of Mary in the

cave at Bethlehem. This reflection gives a new and fuller meaning to the Angelic strain of which we are speaking. Now that the long-desired moment had come, it was right that a fresh burst of thankful praise should welcome its coming.

This is the heavenly part of this song of praise. The earthly part is contained in the words, "on earth peace to men of good will." It is well known that there is here a difference of reading between the Latin and Greek texts, or rather, many Greek manuscripts, and that in the latter the passage is read, goodwill among, or to, men. But in this case, as in so many others, the progress of modern criticism has confirmed the Latin reading, and there is little doubt now that it should be read as it is in our own version. The Incarnation which produces so much glory to God in the highest, where His marvellous attributes are understood, as far as they can be understood by created intelligences, has for its special work on earth the gift of peace.

Man was at war with God, separated from God, the enemy of God, and the Incarnation has for its fruit the placing him in a state of peace with God. Man was at war with himself, as he could not but be, if he was not at peace with God, and the effect of the grace brought into the world by the Incarnation is to make him at peace with his own conscience, and to restore to him that interior peace of his higher and lower parts which was upset by the Fall. Man was the enemy of the holy Angels, because he was the enemy of God, and now God the Lord of the Angels has become man, and they love and tend mankind for the sake of their common

Lord. Man, moreover, was in a state of discord from his neighbour. This was the necessary consequence of the prevalence of self-love, and the rule of the lower passions in individual men. And, moreover, God had found it necessary, for the carrying out of His great counsel of the Redemption, to separate the chosen people of the Jews from the rest of the world, and thus there was, even as to the hopes of reconciliation and salvation, a division among men which St. Paul speaks of as one of the enmities which have been destroyed by our Lord. "He is our peace," he says, "Who hath made both one, and breaking down the middle wall of partition, the enmities, in His Flesh, making void the law of commandments contained in decrees, that He might make the two in Himself into one man, making peace, and might reconcile both to God in one Body on the Cross, killing the enmities in Himself."[2]

Nor was this the only, or most intrinsic, peace made in the world of men by the Incarnation. For they were broken up into numberless tribes, and peoples, and nations, and races, and in each of these there was a fertile principle of mutual division and enmity, so that it had become almost a duty to love neighbours and hate enemies, and the only way by which the hostile elements could be kept in a semblance of peace was by the strong power of one dominant and crushing despotism. Instead of this famous "Pax Romana," our Lord was to introduce into the world the Christian peace of the Catholic unity, which was not only to bind nations

[2] Ephes. ii. 14—16.

together in one loving brotherhood, but to put an end to all the ills of society as such, ills which are for ever, where the influence of the Church is paralyzed, springing up afresh in the form of rivalries and hatreds between class and class. The Incarnation was to bring into the world this principle and power of Divine peace. The mere consideration of this truth is enough to show us at once how wide-reaching and penetrating in its influence is the new spirit of the Kingdom of the Incarnation, and also how we should estimate the spirit of the revival of Paganism in modern times, the tendency of which is to undo the peace which God has given, to rend the unity of the Church, to divide nation from nation, to set up over the whole world a crowd of rival states having in common nothing but mutual distrust, fear, and hatred, and breaking up the bonds of society itself by the hostility of various classes.

This great boon of peace, of which the angels sing, is said in their hymn to be to men of good will. That is, it flows as from its fountain head, from the good pleasure of God. It is His free gift, merited in no way by man, a pure gift of compassion, condescension and mercy. Although it cannot be said that the Greek word which is here used is never to be found in the New Testament applied to any good will but that of God, still this is its use in by far the greater number of the passages in which it occurs, and it cannot be doubted that this is its proper meaning. It is the word used when God is said to have declared from Heaven that our Lord was His beloved Son in Whom He is well pleased, at the Baptism and at the Transfiguration. It is the word

used by our Lord when He gives thanks to the Father for revealing the secrets of His Kingdom to little ones and babes, "for so it was pleasing before Thee."[3] It is the word more than once used in the Epistles, when the good pleasure of choice of God in the execution of His great designs is spoken of, or when His choice of a particular person for a special work is mentioned.[4] The angels look first of all to this, the natural and original source of all the mercies of God, for it is He that first loved us, before we loved Him. The language does not imply that the goodwill of God does not extend to all, in the sense that His free choice is not that all should be saved and profit by the graces which He has offered them. It means that this choice of His is His own free and spontaneous act, without any merit or title on the part of those on whom it is bestowed. Thus it is said in the Epistle to the Corinthians, that God was not "pleased," in this sense, with many of the Israelites in the desert, "who were overthrown in the desert."[5] But that passage is followed by a long list of their iniquities and disobediences, on account of which it was that they were rejected. This then is the meaning of the expression "goodwill" in this second part of this angelical hymn.

The true meaning of the Greek word, then, almost certainly refers to the good will of God. It is not simply what we intend by the ordinary words good will or benevolence, and the like. It is the choice and

3 St. Matt. iii. 17; xvii. 5; xi. 26; St. Luke xii. 32; 2 St. Peter i. 17.
4 Ephes. i. 5, 9; Philip. ii. 13; 1 Cor. i. 21; Gal. i. 15.
5 1 Cor. x. 5.

purpose and decree of God freely determining on a certain act or course of immense beneficence to those who are the objects of His choice. Thus we cannot suppose the blessed angels to have had in their minds only the universal and ordinary goodness of God to His creatures, wonderful as this may be. Rather they must be supposed to speak of some one peculiar and pre-eminent instance of this inexhaustible bountifulness of their Heavenly King. And this can be no other than the mystery before us. The meaning is supplied to us in the Epistles of St. Paul, where he uses the word to denote the one great transcendent instance of God's goodness in the decree of the Incarnation, with all its fruits in Heaven and on earth. Thus we find St. Paul in the opening passage of the Epistle to the Ephesians pouring himself out thus: "Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we might be holy and unspotted in His sight in charity, Who hath predestinated us unto the adoption of children through Jesus Christ Himself, according to the purpose of His will, unto the praise of the glory of His grace in which He hath graced us in His well-beloved Son, in Whom we have redemption, through His Blood, the remission of sins, according to the riches of His grace, which hath superabounded in us in all wisdom and prudence, that He might make known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He hath purposed in Him, in the dispensation of the fulness of times to re-establish all things in

Christ, that are in Heaven and on earth, in Him, in Whom we also are called by lot,"[6] and the rest. Again, he says to the Colossians that "in Him," that is, in our Lord, "it hath pleased (the Father) that all fulness should dwell, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, making peace through the Blood of His Cross, both the things that are on earth, and the things that are in Heaven."[7] These great passages of St. Paul describe the good pleasure of God in the Incarnation, and it is this good pleasure or choice of which the holy angels now sing in their hymn of thanksgiving at Bethlehem.

It may also be noticed that in both these passages the Apostle speaks of the twofold counsel of God as accomplished in the Incarnation, the reconciling to Himself of things in Heaven and things on earth through our Lord. Thus he seems to echo the twofold division of the words of the angels, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will." The angels speak first of the heavenly glory resulting from the Incarnation, and then of the peace on earth which is the fruit of the same mystery. And it may be remarked also how perfectly the Holy Church, in the hymn which she has drawn out of these words of the angels, follows out this twofold idea. In the first part of the *Gloria* she seems to be dwelling on the first words of the angels, and expanding them. The *Laudamus te, benedicimus te, adoramus te, glorificamus te,* are the expressions of the affections which the angels might pour forth before the throne of the Divine Majesty at the sight of the Incarnation, and the thought of

6 Ephes. i. 3, seq. 7 Coloss. i. 19, seq.

all the glory that issues from it in Heaven. The same may be said of the next words, addressed also to the Eternal Father, *Gratias agimus tibi, propter magnam gloriam tuam, Domine Deus, Rex cœlestis, Deus Pater Omnipotens.* Then the hymn turns to the earthly results of the great mystery, hailing our Lord as the Incarnate Son, the Lamb of God, Who brings about peace on earth by means of the execution of the good counsel of God in the redemption by His Blood, *Domine Fili unigenite, Jesu Christe.* He is God and Man, the Redeemer, the Lamb of God Who taketh away the sins of the world. *Domine Deus, Agnus Dei.* He is twice invoked as taking away the sins of the world. First He is simply asked for mercy, and then He is asked to receive the prayer and supplication of the Church which is about to be offered to Him in His own Sacrifice. *Qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis. Qui tollis peccata mundi, suscipe deprecationem nostram.* And lastly He is called on as having accomplished His work and reigning at the right hand of the Father, from whence He is to come again as Judge. *Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris, miserere nobis.* And the Church concludes her hymn by associating Him in the Godhead with the Father and the Holy Ghost, as in so many of her prayers. *Quoniam tu solus Sanctus, tu solus Dominus, tu solus Altissimus, Jesu Christe, cum Sancto Spiritu in gloria Dei Patris.*

Thus the *Gloria* divides itself into these two parts, in the first of which the strain of praise seems to correspond to the heavenly part of the Angelic Hymn, while in the second it answers to the earthly part. And it may further be remembered how these

two divisions of the subject-matter may be found also in the Evangelical Canticles of which we have spoken in the former volume. The *Magnificat* speaks directly of the effects of the Incarnation in Heaven itself, where the proud are scattered in the imagination of their hearts, the mighty are put down from their seats, where the rich are sent empty away, while the lowly are exalted, and the hungry filled with good things. This is a description of the discomfiture of the Angels, which was connected with their rebellion, on the occasion of the proposal to them of the mystery of the Incarnation, and of the exaltation of mankind in their place by the merits of the humiliation of Jesus Christ. At the end of her canticle, the Blessed Mother of God speaks of the Incarnation itself, the faithfulness of God to His promises from the beginning. But she seems to leave to the blessed Zachary to draw out in his own song of praise the earthly part of the mystery, the "making peace by means of the Blood of the Cross," as St. Paul puts it. The whole burthen of the *Benedictus* is this work of making peace, the work of the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world, and it ends by the mention of peace.

There is a further mystery of which St. Paul also speaks in the Epistle to the Ephesians, both in the passage from which we have already quoted, and in another somewhat later in the Epistle. This mystery, the vocation of the Gentiles, is the special subject of the third Evangelical Canticle, the song of holy Simeon. St. Paul says of this mystery, that "it was not known in other generations to the sons of men as it is now revealed to His holy Apostles and

prophets in the spirit, that the Gentiles should be fellow-heirs and of the same body, and co-partners of His promise in Jesus Christ, by the Gospel." This also may be considered as being embraced under the words of the *Gloria*. For it is difficult to set any limits to the meaning of the words in which our Lord is hailed as the Lamb of God Who taketh away the sins of the world. But St. Paul goes on to speak of it as a revelation even to the Angels, that the "many varied" wisdom of God may be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places by the Church."[8]

The Angels did not linger long. If they had, their listeners must have forgotten everything else, and their part in the mystery of the Nativity would not have been done. "And it came to pass, that after the angels departed from them into Heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go to Bethlehem, and let us see this word that is come to pass, which the Lord hath showed to us." Their language is not that of doubt, as if they had been anxious to verify the statements of the Angel. They take it for certain that what they have been told is true, and they desire to see the marvel which had been revealed to them, as if the simple fact that they had been made conscious of the immense condescension of God imposed on them, beyond all others, the duty of bearing their humble homage to the new-born Child. For this is the true principle of Christian devotion, the obligation of honouring, without any express command so to do, whatever is revealed to us on the part of God deserving honour,

[8] Ephes. iii. 5, 6, 10.

veneration, worship, especially if it be, as in the case of the Nativity, connected with great condescension and humiliation for our sakes. Thus we need no direct injunction to make us honour our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, or to pay homage to our Lady, or to our Guardian Angel, as soon as we know that such honour is due to each, in various degrees.

"And they came with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the Infant lying in a manger." It must be supposed that their feet were guided by Angels, so that they had no difficulty in finding the spot, and perhaps it lay on the outskirts of the little town, and was very easily accessible. The sacred narrative does not tell us of their worship, or of their simple gifts and offerings, or of anything that passed between them and the Blessed Mother or St. Joseph, as they were admitted, the first of all human visitors, to pay their homage to the Infant King. It is enough to add here that they bore their simple witness to the truth, finding everything exactly as they had been led to expect by the Angel, and thus believing more firmly the Divine truths imperceptible to mortal eye, and incapable of direct proof, concerning the Person and Office of the Child before them in the manger. "And seeing, they understood of the word that had been spoken to them concerning this Child." What they saw made them take in the whole truth. Their simple bold faith overmastered all the difficulties which might have presented themselves to other minds.

Thus our Lord was provided by the guidance of His Father with worshippers,even while in His cradle,

and that cradle a manger of animals. The simplest and the poorest came, when the wise and the noble, the priests and the sovereign, stayed away. And the humble shepherds became, in their turn, apostles of the new-born King. Such persons are not usually silent or uncommunicative concerning the marvels which they witness, while at the same time they are often selected on account of their very simplicity and their incapacity of inventing wonders, as the best witnesses of those wonders. "And all they that heard wondered at these things that were told them by the shepherds." That is, it seems, they wondered at the marvellous birth under such strange circumstances, especially when they connected it with the angelic vision and revelation, and the perfect manner in which the sign had been found to agree with the facts. "And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, as it had been told them." The twofold expression, glorifying and praising God, seems to imply that they understood by a Divine illumination the twofold cause for those affections which had been suggested to them by the angels, who glorified God for His immense work of power and mercy, and also for the infinite condescension which had led Him so deeply to lower His majesty by taking flesh for the redemption of the world.

It is almost needless to speak of the many Divine reasons which may be given for this Providential arrangement. But it is clear that the selection of the shepherds of the neighbourhood of Bethlehem as the first human adorers of our Lord in His cradle, is entirely in keeping with the law of the

Divine action of which we have spoken. It was the will of God that the Birth of His Son should be made known in this simple and natural way, and when He chose those humble shepherds of the country in which David had fed his father's flocks, as the witnesses to the vision of the angels and the recipients of His message from them, He acted in the same manner in which He was about to act in a score of instances later on in the history of the Church. Thus we are only stating the same truth in other words, when we say that, when the mercies which God is preparing to pour out at some new shrine, where our Blessed Lady vouchsafes to appear to stir up the dormant devotion of the Christian people, are made manifest by means of peasant boys or girls to whom she makes herself known, it is but another instance of this rule of Divine action of which we are speaking, the rule which God observed at the Birth of His own Son at Bethlehem, when the Angel was sent to the shepherds watching over their flocks at night, with his tidings of great joy.

Christian contemplation has delighted to dwell on the beautiful scene which is represented to us in the adoration of the shepherds in that midnight cave, which had suddenly become the holiest, and therefore the most glorious, spot in the whole world. The loving soul of St. Francis fastened on it with a special devotion, and we owe it to him that, all over the world, almost wherever there is a Catholic Church in which the feast of Christmas can be solemnized, there also there is usually some representation of the Crib with the shepherds adoring by the side of Mary and Joseph. On no incident in all

the sacred history has the devotion of Christians dwelt with greater love and reverence. It has furnished the theme for the tenderest poetry, the subject for the highest art. And well may it have been so, for the shepherds represented the whole race of the redeemed, the men of the "goodwill" of whom the angels sang, and in their humble offerings and worship the whole Catholic Church paid her first homage to her Lord and Spouse. Their simplicity and their faith, and other qualities, typify the virtues which are most necessary in them who are to be the true worshippers of the Incarnate God. There is even a deep meaning in the tradition which supposes that they took with them as offerings some of the firstlings of their flocks. It was seemly that the animal creation also should be represented in the homage paid to the new-born King, and that the sacrifice which He was to accomplish as the Lamb of God should thus have been foreshadowed, as it had been at the beginning of the world by the offering of Abel.

There can be no doubt as to the place which our Blessed Lady and St. Joseph occupied in this adoration of the angels and the shepherds. The angels knew already of the exalted position of the Mother of God, and they had also been made aware of the office committed, by the instrumentality of one of themselves, to her glorious Spouse. The shepherds had had no revelation made to them as to the character of the "Paternity" of St. Joseph, but they must have given him, in their simple way, his due honour, besides paying their natural homage to the glorious Mother. "They found Mary and

Joseph, and the Child lying in the manger." Thus at the very outset of the Life of our Lord in the world, the veneration paid to Him, both by Heaven and earth, was extended, in all due measure, to His Mother, and to St. Joseph. Thus the Church, which has never carried her veneration for them higher than in our own days, is yet only repeating in the nineteenth century the lesson that was taught her, by angels and by men, while He was yet an Infant of a few hours old.

CHAPTER III.

OUR LORD IN THE CRIB.

St. Luke ii. 19; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 9.

"But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart." We have already spoken of our Blessed Lady as the first chosen worshipper and honourer of her Divine Son, in the new existence which He took on Himself when He became perfect Man in her sacred womb. It was her office to understand, as far as human intelligence could understand, the infinity of His condescension in the Incarnation. Who He was, what was His work, the endowments of His Sacred Humanity, as well as the attributes of His Divinity. All that our theology has drawn out for us in the course of the long pilgrimage of the Church on earth, and much more, was understood by her from the first. All the knowledge which was thus hers was a knowledge not barren and cold, but fruitful of the tenderest and most impetuous affections of love and gratitude. Now that our Lord had come forth from her virginal womb in the cave of Bethlehem, He began another phase and stage of His Human Life. He revealed Himself in a new manner, and all the incidents which ushered Him into the world were

full of Divine instruction. We cannot doubt that His Blessed Mother now again was enriched by a new dowry of graces and gifts, corresponding to the advance that had been made in the accomplishment of the counsels of God in the Incarnation.

The scenes of which we have been speaking in the last chapter were rich in revelations concerning our Lord, and they had called out in His Mother and in St. Joseph the exercise of the very highest virtues under the most trying circumstances. All this would be a reason for a great increase in their spiritual gifts, immense as those gifts already were. It seems to have been the method of God in dealing with the most beautiful soul of His Mother, to guide her on and on by the illuminated workings of her own mind and heart, as well as by great inpourings of grace and light on His own part, independently of her own faithful correspondence to His graces.

At this stage of the history, we have the wonderful words inserted about her "keeping all these words, pondering them in her heart." It might almost seem as if these words, which are repeated again by St. Luke concerning our Blessed Lady, were meant to give us a hint of something peculiarly characteristic of our Blessed Lady. It seems as if they were meant to imply that she was especially one of those souls whose great book from which they learn is the daily Providence of God, the course of His dealings with them in their own lives, and in the incidents which come across them therein. Such souls need no other lessons than those which are thus given them day after day, and they find in them most abundant instruction as to the very highest secrets

and most sublime ways of God. Common life is to them a daily revelation, and their attention feeds itself on its events. It was indeed the case that Mary had to do with the execution of the most wonderful counsels of God. In this respect her life seems raised in its commonest incidents to a level which can be reached by no other. All the more was it a fitting characteristic for so favoured a soul, that she should drink in everything that happened to her and around her with the most loving attention, that each word or act of our Lord, each circumstance of the unfolding of His Life and of His action on the world, each individual beauty of the marvellous providence by which all these things were arranged, should fall on her heart like the seed on the good ground, and bear the full and multiplied fruit which requires nothing so much for its growth and ripening as a soil so good. But even to ordinary souls, who know in some measure how to live in the sight of God, everything comes from Him and is referred to Him, and the incidents of what seems the plainest and simplest life are full of the most Divine teaching, fraught with immense powers of fertilization and productiveness, so to say, in the kingdom of grace.

Thus the Blessed Mother becomes our teacher in the method of listening to and profiting by the daily teachings of our Lord. And, indeed, we may well here remind ourselves of the immense dignity and grandeur of the life of ordinary Christians in the Catholic Church. Do we not live among the same mysteries as those in the midst of which that Blessed Mother spent her life after the Annuncia-

tion? We are daily conversant with the Presence of our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, whether in the Holy Mass, which is a repetition of Calvary, or in Holy Communion, or in that perpetual presence in the Tabernacle, which is a continuation of the Life of Bethlehem and Nazareth. The Precious Blood which was first shed at the Circumcision is continually around us, its application to our souls is made by every Sacrament that we receive, and in a thousand other ways. The miracles which encompass our daily life, such as that which is wrought at Holy Mass, are not less miraculous because they are ordinary. It may be said with great truth, that if a soul whose opportunities were not greater than those of an ordinary Christian could bring itself to catch our Blessed Lady's thoughtfulness in penetrating the supernatural character of daily incidents, and in tracing therein the workings and ways of God, there would be little more wanting to make that soul the soul of a saint. It seems therefore natural to pause a little at this point of the narrative, and endeavour to give some account to ourselves of the subjects which may have thus become the food of these marvellous contemplations of the mind and heart of the Mother of God.

It is a common thought among the holy writers concerning this stage of the Life of our Lord, that now for the first time He took on Him, in the measure and the manner in which it was becoming to His age and condition so to do, the office of our teacher. In the crib and in the arms of His Mother and of St. Joseph, He does not speak, or go beyond the range of activity which belongs to the age of

infancy. His intelligence and Heart, and all the faculties of each, are in their fullest development. He is already full of grace and light, with that fulness which knows and admits of no increase in its own infinity, but which is also a fulness out of which all are to receive in ever flowing streams, without any exhaustion of the source from which those streams are to flow. His Divine Person is there, and His Sacred Human Nature, full with all the wisdom and knowledge of God. But He has determined not to outstrip, in His own case, the measure of the manifestation of intelligence and wisdom which belongs to infancy. He lets His tongue be silent, all His movements and actions are such as befit an infant. But all the time He is in the Chair of the doctor and teacher, and the lessons which He delivers are full of the most Divine wisdom. They have sounded on from that cave in Bethlehem, age after age, writing themselves in the hearts of the children of the Catholic Church as deeply as those which He gave forth from the Cross, where He hung but three hours and where He spoke but seven words, or those others which He taught by His silence during the long period of His Hidden Life, ten times as long as that of His public teaching. The words of St. Luke tell us that His Mother was His first and most attentive pupil in the holy wisdom which now issued from His cradle.

The *Magnificat* teaches us sufficiently that the first thought of our Blessed Lady, in her study of the revelations of Bethlehem, would probably be that of the wonderful attributes of God, as displayed in the mystery before her eyes. The wisdom of God

consists not simply in His infinite knowledge of Himself and of all things outside Himself, but also in the manner in which He arranges everything in His Providence and government of His Kingdom, so as to attain the ends which He sets before Himself in the best and most fitting manner. The end of God in arranging the entrance of His Son into the world, was to give to Himself the most supreme glory, and to man the most efficacious and attractive means of learning, and becoming capable, how to serve Him. But nothing could possibly give so much glory to God as the humiliation of our Lord in the manger at Bethlehem, nor could anything win the heart of man more powerfully than the manifestation of his God in the form of a Child. The fall of man had come about through pride and disobedience. The victory of Satan had been won by his persuading men that they should become as gods by independence, and that, if they helped themselves to the forbidden tree, they should not die the death. The pride of Adam, his disobedience, his ambition, were corrected by the humiliation of our Lord, His perfect obedience, His taking the very lowest place in His own creation. Thus the false promises of Satan were actually brought about in a new way, by the raising of mankind to that sharing of the Divine Nature which is the fruit to them of the entrance of God Himself as one of them into the lower world, all the miseries of which He partakes, sin only excepted, and by the destruction of all that is fearful in death temporal and of all their danger of death eternal. All the great counsel of the wisdom of God in the restoration of the world

by the humiliation of His Son, was contained in that helpless Child in the manger in the cave.

Much the same may be said of the power, the liberality, the justice, and the mercy of God, of His faithfulness in executing His promises, and of His special love for mankind. The Infant Himself is not only the Omnipotence of God, He is also the greatest work of that Omnipotence by the marvels which make up His new existence and condition. The Deity is united to human nature, and yet the Deity is not lowered or lessened, nor is the human nature consumed and absorbed. He is a Child, yet He has the perfect use of His reason and other faculties. He enjoys the Beatific Vision, and yet He is at the same time a pilgrim in this mortal life. He has all the infinite joys of Heaven, and yet He cries and suffers. He has all the weakness of the infant, and at the same time all the power of God. He is Holy with the intrinsic holiness of God, and yet He seems to be the child of a sinful race. His Humanity has no personality of its own in the order of nature. His Soul is bathed in the possession of beatitude, but it has not for its companion a body in the enjoyment of the glory due to it. The essential felicity of His Soul does not extend itself of necessity to the lower faculties, which are still left liable to pain and grief. His Sanctity is without honour and observance, and His Omnipotence is hidden under the veil of the utmost weakness. From His cradle He is ruling the world, He is undoing the work of Satan, He is drawing to Himself the souls of men, He is at work actively for the glory of His Father. The humble cradle which has served

for the use of the poor animals, contains within it the power on which the whole of the world depends.

The immense liberality of God is a feature in His dealings with us which seems to transcend all our necessities and requirements, for we seem, in the order of nature and of Providence, to be furnished and cared for and waited on in a manner which makes it difficult for us to use all the provisions that are made for us. Our life is an abundant banquet, the world teems with good things which we cannot exhaust, the prodigality of nature seems rather to tempt us to excess and waste than to confine us within the modest limits of our needs. So it certainly would be, if it were not for the moral misery which infects our fallen race. If sin and selfishness were away, there could be none in the world to complain of poverty and of the other hardships of life. Nature provides abundantly for all. But it is far more thus in the order of grace, and especially in the inventions of the love of God which come to us as the results of the Incarnation. For what more can God do for us in the way of giving, than to give us His Only Son, the Person of the Divine Word, made a man like ourselves, and bearing with Him all the treasures of the Divine wisdom and knowledge, the endless graces and pledges of glory which are enfolded in Himself? It seems as if God had measured His liberality to us, not so much by our needs, as by His own powers of imparting Himself to us. The gift which He gives us in the Child of Bethlehem is, moreover, a gift infinite in its fruitfulness, for our Lord is stored and filled with graces not for Himself only, as if

they were to remain shut up in His own Sacred Humanity, but all His treasures are for us, an inexhaustible fountain of spiritual goods, from which the more we take the more we are invited to take afresh and in addition for ever. And the liberality of God is also shown in the easy access which He affords to all who would avail themselves of His bounty. For nothing can be more easy of approach than a humble child in a manger.

Again, we have seen how our Blessed Lady delighted in the *Magnificat* to celebrate the faithfulness of God in giving and in fulfilling His promises to His people. But now the simple fact of the birth of our Lord at Bethlehem had crowned the whole long series of the instances of His faithfulness. It is the especial honour, so to say, of the faithfulness of God, that He does not let Himself be provoked, by the coldness or ingratitude or unfaithfulness of men to Him, to omit the fulfilment of what He has pledged Himself to in their favour. All through the history of the chosen people there runs this strain of the ingratitude of those to whom the promises were made, and the overwhelming constancy and faithfulness of God. And now the greatest of all promises had been fulfilled in the birth of our Lord. It had been fulfilled under circumstances of fresh provocation. For surely it might have seemed just and right if God had turned away from that cold-hearted, indifferent population, who could not even rouse themselves from their selfishness and worldliness so far as to find a room in the town for the sheltering of the Mother of the promised King, Who was to shed on their insignificant

homes the glories of Heaven itself. He had promised to bring about there the birth of the Saviour of the world, but He had not promised to put up with their unbelief, their want of hospitality, their hardness to the stranger, and to accept all the humiliations involved in the place where alone there was room for that Divine condescension to work itself out. But the faithfulness of God once more overcame the ingratitude of men, and the Saviour of the world came into it at Bethlehem, as if it had been His purpose to show that no human rudeness and insolence could chill His love or make Him forfeit His word.

The two attributes of the justice and the mercy of God are also very conspicuous in the scene in the cave at Bethlehem. The eye of faith sees in our Lord, all through His earthly Life, the image of the mercy of God in the salvation of mankind from their sins and the consequences of their sins. In this the Child in the manger is not different from the Youth at Nazareth or the Man Who dies on the Cross. But we see in the manger of Bethlehem, for the first time, the assumption by our Lord of His office of Saviour, in which are combined the workings of these two attributes. For it is now that He takes on Himself for the first time the penalties of our present condition, the capacity of the sufferings which came into the world as the companions and consequences of sin, the pangs of hunger, the effects of the cold and the heat, of the exposure to the blasts of winter, the hardness of the crib, and the like. All the miseries of which sin has been the fertile parent to our race are there, and He takes

them on Himself at once, and by this He shows that He will take on Himself our sins themselves, and expiate them fully on the Cross. He is no delicate Saviour, who will not touch the worst and the meanest of our condition. He takes it all on Himself at once, so far as it lies within the reach of His present state and age, and in this He shows in a new and special way that the mercy of God is enshrined in Him. And the fact that He does this is at the same time the proof and evidence of the justice of God, Who exacts of our Saviour no perfunctory or momentary expiation, but that He should touch and know and bear in Himself all the miseries which have been brought into the world by sin, as well as expiate, by His unheard of sufferings and by death itself, the outrages offered to the Divine Majesty by the sins of man. Thus His childish cries and shiverings in the crib are the effects at the same time both of God's infinite mercy and of His infinite justice.

But there are a number of other Divine teachings in the scene before us, which could not be lost on the ever watchful heart of the Blessed Mother. Our Lord in the crib not only sets before us so many of the wonderful attributes of God. He also teaches us the virtues which are the most acceptable offerings and return that man can make to God. He chose certain things which belong to our human condition as His own from the very beginning, and these choices of His are the instruction of mankind. He came to heal us, not only by expiating the guilt of our offences on the Cross, but also to heal us by His example, and to show us the path of peace and

light in the service of the Father. In the present stage of His Divine Life on earth, He cannot teach all the whole range of the sublimest virtues equally, but Bethlehem has its appointed lessons as well as Nazareth or Calvary, and He teaches in His manger bed as eloquently as by the side of the Lake in Galilee, or in the temple of Jerusalem. We may select a few of these principal lessons of this time, as the sequel to what has already been said concerning the attributes of God as illustrated in the Infancy. We may speak of His poverty, His humility, His meekness, His treatment of what the world esteems and honours, His patience, His obedience. We may add, also, His silence and practice of interior acts and affections, and we may gather from those whom He selects to surround Him in His sacred chair of teaching at Bethlehem some other virtues which He particularly loves and shows His love for at this time, such as the docility of St. Joseph, the simplicity of the shepherds, the bold faith of the royal pilgrims of the Epiphany, and the incomparable purity of His Mother. These virtues furnish us with a perfect crown or constellation of graces and glories, which seem to belong in a special manner to His earliest Infancy.

The very entrance of our Lord into the world which He has made, is marked by the strictest poverty. He is rich with all the riches of Heaven, and all the treasures of the earth are His by right. The children of the poor are always cared for with the utmost of provision that the scanty resources of their parents permit, for Infancy is not an age when poverty is usually practised for its own sake

when it can be avoided. But the scene in the cave at Bethlehem reveals to us the predilection of our Lord for this chosen virtue. He has the bare necessaries of His condition, with no superfluity. Rather, He has the necessaries in the scantiest measure, and what He deigns to make use of in the way of necessity is poor and mean of its kind. Every detail is chosen with unerring wisdom, and the result is what we see. When we turn to the thought of His humility, it is the same. Humility is the essential virtue of our Lord, the virtue that He will never cease from practising throughout all eternity, for He will always be God united to a human nature, and in the human nature infinitely humble. In Heaven He does not suffer any more, He is not dishonoured any more, He can feel no more sorrow, and the like, but He is for ever and always and essentially humble, and this humility He begins to manifest in His cradle at Bethlehem. It may be said that no one but our Lord can be truly humble, for all other humiliations are deserved, and belong by right to those who practise them. He alone can humble Himself without taking therein the place that is simply due to Him. And if humility is to be measured by the dignity of the Person Who is humble, here again the humility of our Lord is all His own, and can be shared in by none, because the dignity of His Person is incomparable.

Thus in the cave He begins at once to hide Himself, His greatness as God and as Man is concealed under the form of an Infant, His wisdom is veiled by His childhood, His power hidden in weakness, His riches concealed under the poverty which

meets our eye. The whole world was before Him, and He might have entered it where and how He liked, but He has chosen the little town rather than the royal city, the condition of a stranger unknown to all around, rather than that of an expected and honoured guest, He has made choice of the poor artisan for His seeming Father, and the humble maiden for His Mother. The cave is the home which welcomes Him, the manger is His royal couch, the animals and the poor shepherds are the courtiers who wait on the new-born King.

These are the choices of humility, and if this first example of His is not enough, we find Him continuing all through His mortal life to renew these choices over and over again, never weary of the manifestation of His love for humility unto the very end. Even after His triumph on the Cross, when He returns for awhile on the earth, He hides Himself still, and shows Himself without the glories which belong to Him, and this only to a few chosen witnesses. Then, after His return to Heaven to take His place at the right hand of His Father, He invents, in the Blessed Sacrament, a new way of remaining among us, for the welfare and consolation of our souls, and this new way of existence is one in which He is still able to indulge to the utmost His passionate love for the utmost and most persevering humility. It has often been said, as indeed it is pointed out in more ways than one by the Church herself, that there is a great resemblance between the mysteries of the Blessed Sacrament and the mysteries of the Holy Infancy. In nothing is this resemblance more striking than in the im-

mense humiliation of our Lord in each of these marvels of His love.

It might have been thought that a certain amount of display and magnificence, such as would draw to our Lord the attention and the honour of the world, would not have been without its good effects, inasmuch as He was to present Himself to mankind as the promised King, the founder of a kingdom which was to establish itself among the powers of earth. Nothing of the sort, however, is to be discerned in the choices made by our Lord with regard to everything that might tend either to make Him honourable or the subject of contempt. His Birth was the fulfilment of a long line of prophecies, and as a matter of fact, the policy of the Roman Emperor had been set in motion by Divine Providence in order to bring about the journey of His Mother to the spot in which the Birth had been promised. Notwithstanding this, the Birth itself was of the humblest and most unconspicuous kind. It took place in a cave, the abode of animals, in the silence of midnight, with no preparation, no crowd of assistants, no pomp or ceremony, and the three shepherds from the neighbourhood were the only persons made aware of it, or summoned to do it honour. It would seem as if all the circumstances of the birth in the cave had been carefully selected, so as to run counter to all the ideas and prepossessions of the world, as if our Lord had desired to trample under His feet, from the very first, all the common notions of men as to what is honourable and the reverse, choosing, as far as was possible in that tender age, all that might make Him the despised of men and the out-

cast of the people. This was not necessary for His accomplishment of the work given Him to do as our Redeemer. Our Lord might have died on the Cross, even if He had been born and nurtured in the greatest honour and luxury. But it was a part of His office of teacher, to begin from the the very first His denunciation of worldly pride and vanity, the esteem of outward show, of wealth, of honour, of appearance before men. Thus we find Him, even in His cradle, preaching this most powerful sermon against worldliness and ostentation, a lesson which He continued to inculcate until the last moment of His Life.

Patience, mortification, the spirit of penitence, constitute another great head of the teachings of our Lord in the crib. He came to make satisfaction for sins of every kind, but not simply the satisfaction which is contained in His expiation on the Cross, where He suffered in every part of His Body and in every faculty of His Soul, so as to atone by His sufferings there for every kind of sin that could be committed whether in body or in mind. All this was not enough for our Lord. For He came also to be our instruction in every kind of patience and mortification, received and endured in the spirit of penance. He might have had a body incapable of suffering, but this He would not have, that He might suffer for us. Still it was not necessary that He should surround His very entrance into the world with so many circumstances of suffering and pain, that He should begin at once to suffer the petty inconveniences and discomforts which were no light affliction to a tender

babe of the age of a few hours, the exposure to the weather, the hardness of the place in which He was laid, the penury, and the sense of want which we see in the crib. These ills of our life are the heritage of all born in original sin, they are the consequences and penalties of the Fall, and if they are borne with patience and in the spirit of which we are speaking, they have a great power for the increase of virtue in the soul and for the expiation of sin. Our Lord was innocence itself, neither had He deserved any of these penalties, nor could their suffering make Him more perfect in virtue, or shield Him from any of the dangers of a life of ease and comfort. But He desired, from the very beginning of His life, to be in this world as in a place of penance, and so He took to Himself all these penalties, and allowed His Sacred Soul and Heart to be afflicted from the very beginning by the thought of the numberless sins of all mankind for which He was to become responsible, and of all the sufferings which He was to endure, to make atonement for them. And so at the same time He began to teach this lesson of the patient suffering of these minor inconveniences and afflictions, that that lesson might sink into our hearts while we are in the full tenderness of the contemplation of His most loveable and attractive Infancy, and may there take root, to guard us from the miseries of softness and self-indulgence, and prepare us to walk through the whole of our life, whatever may be the afflictions with which His Providence may supply us, in the spirit of patience and penitence.

The obedience of our Lord in this stage of His

Life is another great lesson. He came not only to die out of obedience, but to set the most perfect example of this virtue from the very outset. Thus we have already noticed that the birth in Bethlehem itself was an act of obedience, not only to the decree of His Eternal Father, but to the edict of an earthly Sovereign prompted by pride or policy, and in no way by the desire of glorifying God. The state of a child in the arms of his mother is one of the most perfect subjection and obedience and dependence, and in the case of our Lord this was enhanced by the extreme dignity of His Person and also by the perfection of His Manhood in all its faculties of the intelligence and the will. Nor were the matters of suffering in which His obedience to His Father's decrees was manifested, slight and such as it cost Him nothing to submit to. Though not so great and striking in themselves as the details of His Passion on Mount Calvary, they are still the sufferings and incommodities which are the most trying and hard at an age like His, and it is a great blessing to us to have all these minor afflictions sanctified for us by His touch.

His love for His Father and for us are other virtues which shine forth conspicuously in this stage of His Infancy, not only in the fact that He undergoes all that He does undergo out of love for the will of His Father, in zeal for His glory, in desire to repair it, in the desire to make satisfaction even as an Infant for our sins, and in other such ways, but also because He is all the time occupied in the most fervent interior acts of love for His Father, and love for us, in desires of our salvation and of

His glory. Thus it is a part of the true intelligence of this period of the Holy Infancy to understand how much our Lord is now teaching us the value of the interior life of the soul under the eyes of God, the value of the incessant activity of desires, affections, contemplations, acts of thanksgiving, praise, adoration, conformity to God's will, and the like, which is so large a part of the real life of the saints of God upon earth. They may be utterly unknown to the world, their life entirely hidden with our Lord in God, buried as men deem it in a cloister, or tied to a lonely bed of sickness, or in some other way entirely removed from any outward sphere of communication with the world. And yet they may be all the time more profitable to mankind and more dear to God than a whole army of good souls, spending their time in active works of virtue and charity.

Such, then, are some of the more special lessons which are to be learnt by the Christian soul from the crib of Bethlehem. It is natural to complete this subject by the consideration of another great head of the teaching which is here conveyed to us by our Lord, namely, that which is to be found in the persons by whom He surrounds Himself in this scene of His Sacred Infancy. This is another method by which we are taught the predilections of our Lord at this time of His Life, when His own lips are sealed in silence. He teaches us most eloquently by the circumstances of His birth, by the humble cradle in which He chooses to recline, by the loneliness and vileness of the spot which He selects as His home, before all the palaces of the

world, by the cold and exposure and shortness of provision of every kind, which He so gladly embraces as the surroundings of His entrance into the world of men. So also beyond all doubt He means to teach us also by the few humble and despised persons whom He calls around Him. He cannot be Himself the example to us of every virtue at all times of His Life, and thus it may be that He shows us at some particular time the virtues in which He delights, by means of the saints who surround Him, rather than by His own example.

We may learn, then, from the simplicity of the shepherds, how He loves that blessed virtue, to which is ensured, without more ado, the special protection of God in all the snares and dangers of human life. He may mean to speak to us again of the immense value which He sets on faith, acting fearlessly on the light which is given to it, under whatever dispensation, by the special favour which He bestows on the wise Princes from the East, of whom we shall soon have to speak. For although their faith was not of the same order, perhaps, as that of our Blessed Lady and St. Joseph, still they have the peculiar privilege of representing, in the crowd of saints gathered around the new-born King, the blessedness of those who have comparatively little light and yet are very faithful thereto. The conduct of St. Joseph again, shows us the beauty of the perfectly docile soul, led on from one point of holy and saintly conduct to another, by the guidance of God vouchsafed in many various ways, never anticipating the needs of the day, always ready at the right moment when the decision has to be made,

the docility of a soul which God seems to be able to trust absolutely for faithfulness to the intimations of His will like the holy Angels themselves, who are never in need of instruction beforehand as to the messages or works committed to them. And of course it stands to reason, that among all the saints of this period of the Holy Infancy our Blessed Lady shines out in a pre-eminence of her own, with the combined light of a thousand holy virtues, but still perhaps representing in a more special manner the predilection of her Lord and Son for her most spotless purity. For the mysteries of Bethlehem begin by a fresh manifestation of the bounty of God to her in this respect, that beautiful privilege of which the Church sings, as soon as she begins to celebrate the festival of Christmas, "Post partum Virgo, inviolata permansisti! Dei genitrix, intercede pro nobis." We have already said something of the importance of this privilege of our Blessed Lady, on which the Church seems to have been guided to fasten at once, on account of the blessing to her children which it involves.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CIRCUMCISION.

St. Luke ii. 21; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 10.

We all know that in ordinary life the things which are of the commonest occurrence, the established regulations and customs, whether of families or of the community at large, are not specially recorded by the historian. We take for granted that, as a household must be governed, the master of the house is responsible for the management of the affairs of the family, and that what is done therein is done by his order. If it is well done, it is put, so to say, to his credit, if it is badly done, it is set to his discredit. The character and disposition which are predominant in him, may be read in the ordinary routine of his household. If it proceeds smoothly and with good discipline it is considered that he is a good manager, and knows how to wield his authority. If things are loose, out of order, and uncontrolled, it is thought that he is weak and unfit for any post of responsibility. But in any case it is not necessary to say specially that the most ordinary things in the daily routine of life, or the arrangement of any particular matter, which naturally falls under his authority, have been, as a matter of fact, regu-

lated by him. What is exceptional is mentioned, what is ordinary is taken as understood.

If we look upon the sacred history of the Holy Infancy in this light, it becomes obvious that we have in it a continual though silent record of decisions and acts of St. Joseph, as to which no precise mention is made of his name. We are told, from time to time, of instances in which he was supernaturally guided, by visions of angels, to take this or that step in the management of the Holy Family. But these are the exceptional cases, and they show us that, where there was no occasion for supernatural intimation, the remainder of the direction of the Holy Family came from him in the natural exercise of his office. These supernatural interferences, so to say, come just whenever there is need of them, and on no other occasions. They regulate matters which could not have been settled without them, such as the Flight into Egypt and the Return from Egypt. Whatever, therefore, is outside the range of these special intimations of the will of God must be set down to the decision of St. Joseph himself as the head of the Holy Family. Such, for instance, is a case specially mentioned in the Gospel, because there was need for such mention, the decision taken by St. Joseph after the return from Egypt, not to settle at Bethlehem. It was necessary for St. Matthew to account for the residence of the Holy Family at Nazareth, of which he had, up to that point, made no mention at all. Yet this step was not taken in consequence of any supernatural guidance. In such steps as this St. Joseph's character is revealed, and of these the responsibility

rests with him. We cannot of course doubt that he consulted in all things the desires and the prudence of his most Blessed Spouse, and that there was never any occasion on which the decisions of his own judgment and authority ran counter to the thoughts of Mary. But, after all, he was the head, and not she, and the perfect beauty and wonderful wisdom of the guidance of the Holy Family in all these early mysteries of the Incarnation are to be ascribed to him directly and officially. When there is need, the Angel appears to him in a dream. At other times, he rules and decides for himself, and for Mary, and for the Infant Jesus, and the history becomes thus the history of his decisions, and of choices made by him.

We are so accustomed to the recital of these glorious mysteries of our faith, that we do not realize easily how many matters relating to them must have come to be decided by one in the place of St. Joseph. He was the appointed steward of the mysteries of that time, as later on the Apostles and the ministers of the Church were to become the same with regard to the administration of the blessings confided to her. Thus, from the moment when, in obedience to the Divine intimation conveyed to him by the Angel, St. Joseph took unto him, as St. Matthew tells us, Mary his wife, all the movements and arrangements of the Holy Family depended on his faithfulness and vigilance. It was in obedience to his direction that our Blessed Lady accompanied him to Bethlehem in the journey which ended in the Nativity of our Lord. He it was who made up his mind that they must take refuge in the

cave in which our Lord was actually born into the world. In the eyes of the first visitors from among men, the Blessed Babe was his Child, and the Blessed Mother his wife. It was by his permission that their visits took place. He was the guardian of the sanctuary, and if their devotion led them to make any poor offerings of their own to the poverty of the new-born King, it was to him that these offerings were entrusted. We are not told how long the Blessed Child and His Mother remained in the cave, but the length of time and the place to which they departed were fixed by St. Joseph.

It may have been a matter of simple necessity, that our Lady should find her first shelter in a cave which was also a stable. But the time soon came for other choices to be made, which were not simply matters of necessity. It must have been a question of some doubt, as we reckon such matters, whether the new-born King was to be subjected to all the conditions of the Mosaic Law. He had come into the world in the exercise of a kind of obedience to the temporal lord of the universe, the heathen Emperor Augustus Cæsar, but was He to submit to all the requirements of the code of Moses, and of the prescriptions involved in the covenant with Abraham? If so, He must be circumcised on the eighth day from His birth, His Blessed Mother must remain under the Law of Purification, like other mothers of the holy nation, and an offering must be made for His redemption in the Temple at the same time with her Purification.

Now we are nowhere told that these possible questions were made matters of revelation to St.

Joseph. They were left to his prudence and to the enlightenment of his soul, already so highly raised in the contemplation and intelligence of the ways of God. There is no hesitation or taking of counsel recorded. Everything proceeds with our Lord as with other children of the holy nation. There are words which ring in our ears, over and over again, as we read the simple narrative in St. Luke, in which this part of the history is preserved for us, and in which, as has been said, we seem to be reading the Gospel of Mary. These words are, "The Law of the Lord." Everything is to be done according to the Law of the Lord. St. Joseph had received no revelation on this point. It was left to his own holy instincts. Thus when eight days were accomplished that the Child should be circumcised, He received the name of Jesus. When the days of her purification were accomplished, according to the Law of Moses, she is taken to the Temple that she may be purified, and that her Child may be presented to the Lord, and the offering is made according to the Law of the Lord. And when all is accomplished according to the Law of the Lord, they return to their own city of Nazareth in Galilee. In all these mysteries we read the perfect prudence and intelligence of the holy Patriarch in the ways of God. It is not too much, also, to say that they reveal him to us as having, above all other things, a most tender and deep devotion to the Law and the will of God.

It is impossible to suppose that there was any lack of intelligence on the part, either of Mary or of her Blessed Spouse, concerning the Divine Person of the new-born Babe. To those who have devoutly

contemplated the earlier mysteries of the life of this blessed pair, such a supposition will naturally seem childish. It follows then that all these decisions, of which we have been speaking, must have been made by St. Joseph and accepted by our Blessed Lady, with the full knowledge that He Who was thus to be subjected to a law made by Himself, but not made, as it might seem, for Himself, was the Incarnate God. It follows also that they must have seen the Divine fitness of His subjection in all these matters, and have understood, in some measure at least, the Divine objects for which, in the counsels of God, that submission had been decreed, the relation in which these actions of His stood to the fulfilment, in the highest sense, of the Old Law, and of the Patriarchal Covenant which had preceded it, and how He was, in all these instances of His humiliation, ratifying and giving efficacy to His own prophetic dispositions for the salvation and healing of mankind, under the former dispensations, as well as leaving behind Him a lesson and an example to the children of the Gospel Kingdom.

It has already been said that the decision as to the carrying out, in the Person of the Infant Saviour of the world, of the prescriptions of the Law in such matters as the Circumcision, must have been left in Providence to the enlightened prudence and intelligence of St. Joseph. He was the Father of the Holy Family. He had been specially commanded to act as such, and in that command was contained the full commission which gave him authority and also secured him all the necessary guidance, whether ordinary or extraordinary. It may perhaps be

thought that, in the command given by the Angel that he should call the Child of Mary by the holy name of Jesus, there was also contained sufficient guidance as to this point of the Circumcision of our Lord. For the giving of the name to Jewish children was an accompaniment of the rite of Circumcision, as it is with Christians a part of the rite of Holy Baptism. In any case, we are not told of any further revelation made either to St. Joseph or to our Blessed Lady in respect of this most practical question.

The days flowed on, in intense happiness and also in intense silence and calm, and after the visit of the holy Shepherds and their humble offerings, we are left to imagine the incidents of this blessed time. We learn from the language of St. Matthew, that when the holy Kings from the East came to pay their homage to our Lord in the arms of His Mother, they found Him and her in a "house." If there were not so many good reasons for thinking that, if the visit of the Kings took place at the time of year at which it is commonly commemorated in the Church, it must in that case have been after the lapse of a year, if not more, from the time of our Lord's Birth, we might infer from this hint of St. Matthew that the Holy Family removed into some humble dwelling in the town of Bethlehem very soon after the Nativity. But we can draw no conclusive argument from the fact that they were in a house at the Epiphany, to prove that they were in a house at the time of the Circumcision, on account of the reasons just referred to, of which we shall have to say more in a future chapter. But it appears

very probable that the cave of the Nativity was not the home of our Lady and the Blessed Child for any great length of time. It must have been a place where they would be in the way of many curious visitors, sent to them, probably, by the reports which were spread about after the visit of the Shepherds. It is expressly said that the Shepherds talked about their visit, "and all that heard wondered, and at those things that were told them by the Shepherds." It would be natural that after a short interval it would be possible for St. Joseph to find some quiet place of abode less in the way of the public, and that he removed our Lady and her Child thither as soon as could be.

It was therefore, as it seems, in some house or cottage at Bethlehem—unless the cave itself of the Nativity had a house adjoining it, as was the case in the Holy House at Nazareth—that the sacred rite of the Circumcision of our Lord was performed on the "eighth day" after His Birth. Circumcision, as our Lord said to the Jews, was not of Moses, but of the Fathers. It was a part of the Patriarchal Dispensation, the test and condition of the covenant of God with Abraham. It was anterior to the Law, the Tabernacle, the Temple, the Synagogue. We do not read anywhere of a rule which enjoined that it should be performed in any holy place, and it seems clear from the account given in St. Luke of the naming of St. John Baptist, that the whole rite was in that case performed in the house of Zachary. It remains altogether uncertain whether it was performed, as seems usually to have been done, by the father, that is by St. Joseph, or by some minister

of the synagogue, a Levite, or some other person. Zachary himself did not circumcise St. John, as it seems, for he was appealed to to settle the question about the name of his son. Christian contemplatives delight in the thought that it was the office of St. Joseph to perform this rite on our Lord, and that he and our Lady together gave Him the holy name of Jesus, "which," as St. Luke says, probably as the mouthpiece of our Lady herself, "which was so called by the Angel, before He was conceived in the womb."

Circumcision had been given to Abraham as a sign of the covenant made with him by God. The Fathers tell us that it cancelled original sin, and thus opened the gates of Heaven to the faithful, making them so far partakers by anticipation of the Redemption which was to be wrought by means of the Sacrifice on the Cross, though they could not enter Heaven until that Sacrifice had been offered. Thus the "regeneration" which had been available under the primitive dispensation, by virtue of some sacrifice or act of faith, was secured to the descendants of Abraham by the rite of Circumcision. It was thus an acknowledgment at once of original sin and of the efficacy of the redemption by the Precious Blood. It was a mark of the descendants of Abraham, and of that faith in the promises made to him which had won so magnificent a reward from God. But all its efficacy was derived from faith, and that it had no sacramental power of its own like that of Christian Baptism, might have been seen in the fact that the females of the chosen people inherited the blessing which it conveyed,

though it was not administered to them personally. It had many other significations, for it was a symbol of the Christian and interior mortification which our Lord was to introduce and make obligatory. It embodied the principle of chastity, and the like. In any case it was for those who lay under the ban of original sin, for those who needed regeneration, for those who had to be elevated and cleansed before they could enter Heaven, for those who were in need of adoption to make them the sons of God. It implied also, as St. Paul teaches, the obligation to keep the whole Mosaic Law, in which it had been preserved and continued as the rite of admission to the covenant of God. Our Lord's reception of it, therefore, was the formal sign that He was, as the same Apostle says, "made under the Law," as well as "born of a woman," and thus able, in the counsels of God, to redeem those that were under the Law, that we might receive "the adoption of sons" through Him.

These few words may suffice as pointing out the Divine reasons why the Redeemer of the world was to be circumcised. He came to redeem all mankind, and it was fitting that He should take up and ratify and give life to, in His own Person, all the conditions and dispensations under which the efficacy of His Redemption had been administered before He came. God always required faith as a condition of being pleasing to Him, and the human race started from Paradise with the revelation of a future Redeemer, the Seed of the Woman, on which its faith had to fasten, and by which it was to live in hope, reconciled to its God. The Sacrifice on the Cross

was the fulfilment of this original promise, and it gave efficacy to all the acts of faith and sacrifice and penitence by which it had been applied to souls under any dispensation. As Circumcision had been chosen as the sign and seal of the covenant with Abraham, our Lord was circumcised, and thereby gave to the rite the efficacy which had been assigned to it. His Circumcision fulfilled and gave power to all the circumcisions which had been administered under the covenant with Abraham, and then took away the rite once for all, the regenerating power with which it had once been connected being transferred to the new Christian Sacrament of Baptism when our Lord was Himself baptized. So also our Lord fulfilled and then took away the Law, bearing, as St. Paul says, the curse threatened on those who disobeyed it, by dying the death on the tree to which the curse was attached.

In all these things we see, in the first instance, how our Lord was not bound to these observances and rites, as being Himself the Lawgiver, and as having in Himself no vestige of the conditions for the remedy of which they were ordained. And we see, in the second place, how a higher necessity, as it were, bound Him to their fulfilment, because all their value was derived from Him in the past, and because He was to fulfil them in order to take away their obligation on others for the future. The Jews, who lived and died in covenant with God, by virtue of these ordinances, received all the benefits which they administered, because He was to touch them. They do not bind on the children of the New Covenant, because their obligation has been fulfilled

and taken away by His having touched them, and because He has enshrined the efficacy of His Precious Blood in other ordinances which have taken their place with new, far greater, and inherent powers.

Thus the Circumcision of our Lord was a mystery, very different indeed in its import and efficacy from the circumcision of an ordinary descendant of Abraham. And, when we ask ourselves as to the intelligence of this Divine mystery which may have been possessed by our Blessed Lady and St. Joseph at the time, we cannot fail to see that it must have been very great and penetrating indeed. We cannot suppose that two persons so highly trusted by God with the execution of His designs for the redemption of the world, were ignorant of the truths which related to the Divine Person of the Incarnate Son. They knew Who the Messias was to be, they knew that the Child in the womb and in the cradle was the Eternal God. Yet in this simple personal truth the whole doctrine of the details, so to speak, of Redemption, was contained. The Incarnate God could not need Circumcision for Himself, He could not have in Him any of the stains or disabilities which were removed by Circumcision, and He could not but be in His own Person the one fountain of cleansing, redemption, elevation, sanctification to others. To say this is to say that the blessed pair who knelt by our Lord in His Infancy must have understood how it belonged to the office of Redeemer to submit to Circumcision, as to other legal obligations which followed upon it in due course of time. And we may gather from the words of

St. Luke, twice repeated, that "His Mother kept all these things in her heart," that the intelligence which she, and therefore in all probability St. Joseph, possessed, was not so much flashed into their souls by direct revelation, as fostered by the silent quiet process of thoughtful musing on the words and acts of God.

There are two things connected with the mystery of the Circumcision on which Catholic contemplatives may love to dwell. The first of these is the fact that the sacred rite which was now performed was in itself very painful, and that it involved the first shedding of the Precious Blood which was afterwards to be poured out upon the Cross. The second is that, according to the universal custom, the Child received His Name from His parents at this time, and that the Name which was received was no other than the holy name of Jesus. A few words may be said on each of these subjects.

The first shedding of the Precious Blood of our Lord could not but touch most tenderly the hearts of His Blessed Mother and St. Joseph. It would have been so in the case of any infant, and of any parents who loved their child. But in the case of our Blessed Lady and St. Joseph, as well as of our Lord, there were circumstances altogether peculiar and unparalleled. In the first place, our Lord was already in full possession of all His mental faculties. His intelligence, His will, and the rest, could never for a single moment have been in that state of half germinal existence which is common in children. This would make the first shedding of His Blood more painful to Him than to others on account

of His perfect consciousness. But, much more than that, this bloodshedding was, on His part, as perfectly a deliberate and free act, as were afterwards that in the Garden, and that in the Prætorium, and that on the Cross. He must have shed this Blood willingly, He must have shed it deliberately, He must have shed it with all the most perfect affections of obedience to the Eternal Father, of love in the sacrifice which He was making, of desire for the salvation of mankind in general, of joy in the fruits of that particular pouring forth of His Blood in the souls of men, in all the blessings which His submitting Himself to that holy rite would involve for those for whom He underwent it. He now began to merit, so to say, the fruits of His office of Saviour, and this could not have been so without the unrolling of all the immense range of those fruits before His mind and Heart. Nor would it be hidden from Him, on the other hand, in how many cases all that He was suffering and all that He was to suffer would be undergone in vain.

In the second place, if we are to seek to enter, on this first mystery of the Precious Blood, into the hearts of Mary and Joseph, we find that the natural tenderness by which they would be touched at the sight of this innocent Blood must have been heightened and intensified in a most marvellous manner by the large extent of their intelligence of the true meanings and bearings of the mystery. The drops of Blood which were then poured out, were not to them the simple marks of natural suffering, caused by the rite on which God had insisted, perhaps, for this very reason, that He might stamp on this initi-

ation of the race of Abraham into covenant with Himself, some mark of the truth that without shedding of blood there is no remission. Our Lord's Mother and her holy Spouse must have well understood the prophecies, and they must have known that the Child was come, not only to save, but to save at the cost of His own Blood. To them He was already the Lamb of God, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. And so the precious drops were to them not simply His Blood, but His Blood to be shed as the ransom of men. They must have seen in them the first-fruits of that most painful and most efficacious Sacrifice which was to be consummated on the Cross.

Moreover, there were moral and spiritual significations connected with the Circumcision of our Lord, which must have been present at the time both to His own mind and to the minds of Mary and Joseph. Our Lord came to change what one of the Fathers calls a lesser circumcision into a greater circumcision. That is, He came to fulfil and to set aside the carnal circumcision to which He submitted, in order to introduce the true Christian circumcision of the heart, the spirit, the whole man, interior as well as exterior. St. Paul speaks of this in his Epistle to the Colossians, to whom he says, alluding to some false doctrines which were current in their part of the world at that time, "that in our Lord they are filled, Who is the head of all principality and power," and then he adds, referring to other heresies by which they were assailed, "in Whom also ye are circumcised, with circumcision not made by hand in despoiling of the body of the

flesh, but in the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in Baptism, in Whom also you are risen again by the faith of the operation of God, Who hath raised Him up from the dead."[1] He has the same thought as to the obligation of Baptism, in the Epistle to the Romans, where He says, "We that are dead to sin, how shall we live any longer therein? Know ye not, that we all, who are baptized in Christ Jesus, are baptized in His death? For we are buried together with Him by Baptism into death, that as Christ is risen from the dead by the glory of His Father, so we also may walk in newness of life."[2] This newness of life is received by the spiritual circumcision which our Lord came to introduce. It was represented by the external ceremony to which our Lord submitted. It involved the perfect accomplishment of the Law, in the fulfilment of the precepts of the love of God and of the love of our neighbour. It implied the painful conquest of the appetites and concupiscences of the old man, and in this it was well prefigured by the actual cutting of the flesh, and by the flow of blood, while at the same time the feeble wills and degenerate instincts of humanity were fortified and endowed with heavenly powers by the grace purchased by the Precious Blood. The interior crucifixion was represented, with all its blessed fruits of perfection and holiness, by the same rite which foreshadowed that Sacrifice of the Cross, by means of which were to be obtained the abundant graces which were needed for that crucifixion.

If the shedding of blood in the Circumcision

[1] Col. ii. 11. [2] Rom. vi. 2—4.

must have signified all these beautiful results of redemption in the souls of the faithful, and thereby filled with a holy and reverential joy the hearts of the blessed pair who were so nearly united to the Heart of our Lord, it is also clear that they must have had a special delight in giving to Him the holy name of Jesus. That name had been borne before this time by some few others, some of whom had certainly been types and forerunners of Him to Whom it primarily belonged, especially the great captain who had led the Israelites into the Promised Land, and under whose guidance its conquest had been achieved. But it was to belong to our Lord in a manner and a measure of His own, indeed, it could rightly and fully belong only to Him. The Angel had insisted on it both to our Lady and to St. Joseph, when he revealed to each in turn the part that they were to bear in carrying out the great counsel of God. It was evidently in our Lady's heart when she uttered her Canticle of praise, for to say that her spirit rejoiced in God her Saviour, was the same thing as to mention this Holy Name. In the same way, the Holy Name is alluded to more than once in the Canticle of Zachary. In the Canticle of our Lady it is connected with the exaltation of the human race to the Kingdom of Heaven in the place of the angels. In the Canticle of Zachary, the holy Prophet seems to dwell more particularly on the blessings of a life of holiness and justice and peace in the service of God, which are secured by the mysteries which are signified in the name of Jesus. But the actual giving of the Name was to be reserved for the time of the Circum-

cision, and thus for the moment when the Precious Blood was to flow for the first time. It was by that Blood that the price was to be paid of the pardoning and the cancelling of sins, of our adoption or sonship to God, of the opening of the gates of Heaven, and of the admission of man to the eternal possession of God.

As the devotion to the Holy Name of Jesus fills so large a space in the hearts of Christians, we may pause for a moment to endeavour to draw out some of the thoughts which belong to that devotion. In the first place it must be remembered that in this, as in other names which occur in the sacred history as having been given by special command or revelation by God, we are assured by this very fact both of the importance of the Name in itself, that it must express fully and perfectly the character and office of Him to Whom it is given, and also that all the graces and blessings involved in the Name will be abundantly supplied by Him Who gives it. It is only an imperfection in human names that they are designations and nothing more. There is no such thing as an empty title in the Kingdom of God, and the names given by Him imply the spiritual gifts or offices which they signify. Much more, of course, must this be the case with the Name of names, the Holy Name of Jesus. It was chosen specially by God, and communicated to the two persons on earth whose office it was to confer it, that is, to Mary and Joseph, with an express injunction that it was to be given by them to the Divine Child, by Mary as His Mother, and by Joseph as His Father, in all except natural generation.

It is, moreover, certain that the Holy Name had been promised and anticipated in the Providence of God. It had been promised in all the predictions which spoke of our Lord as performing the work of salvation, whenever such words as God my Saviour, God shall save us, and the like, had been used by holy prophets of old. It had been in this way the burthen of all the great Messianic prophecies, it had been contained in the whole sacrificial system in which redemption had been prefigured and its fruits applied, in any manner or way whatever, to the souls of men. It had been borne by some of the greatest heroes of the chosen people, whose offices were anticipations of His. Thus the great captain of Israel represented Him as Ruler and as Conqueror of the enemies of our salvation, the great High Priest, the son of Josedech, represented Him as our Pontiff and Sacrifice, and the great teacher of wisdom, the son of Sirac, represented Him as our Master in the holy lore of salvation. Thus each of these represented, in the work which he was called to do for God, some part or branch of the work of our Lord Himself.

Thus, when the name of Jesus came to be given to our Lord by the command of an Angel, and when the reason for it was given that "He was to save His people from their sins," it was implied that He Who was to bear it was to sum up in Himself the verification of all the prophecies, the fulfilment of all the types, personal or real, the accomplishment of the whole work of God as designed in His Eternal Wisdom and love for the salvation of the race of man. Thus, even if we go no further in unfolding

the meaning of this blessed Name as given to our Lord, we have already before us, as contained therein, our deliverance from all our spiritual enemies and dangers, the conquest for us of all the goods and riches of the Kingdom of Heaven, the perfect enlightenment which we need as to the knowledge and the service of God, and the most abundant supplies of grace and strength, all bestowed upon us by means of the most perfect atonement and reconciliation to God through the Sacrifice of the Cross. The fulfilment of the promises and prophecies, as represented in the Holy Name, must be understood as including not only what our Lord was to do for us in His Life and Death, but all that He is to be to us in the Church, all that He is to us in the sacraments, all His personal care and love for our souls, the exercise of His power at the right hand of God in our favour, the intercession which St. Paul and St. John speak of Him as perpetually making, the Light of His example in Himself and in His Mother and His Saints, and the power which He exercises on our behalf through them as well as by Himself, the welcome which He is preparing to give us as our Judge, and the eternal rewards with which He longs to crown us in the possession of Himself.

Our Lord came on earth in order to reveal His Father to us, and to win our hearts to our God. He was to do this especially by making Himself known, by the perfect beauty of His virtues, His sweetness and attractiveness and condescension, His humility and charity and meekness, and a thousand other charms in which the excellencies of His Sacred

Heart unfolded themselves to our intelligence and made our affections captive. This was the essence of His teaching, and as the accomplishment of our salvation required that we should learn to serve God by first loving Him, as well as by having our sins atoned for on the Cross, all this part of the work of our Lord is signified in the Holy Name. Thus it stands as a complete summary and description of our Lord's character, as well as of His office, and it is under this aspect that it has been regarded by thousands of saints, whose hearts have melted at its mere sound, because it has recalled to them all that He has thus revealed to them of Himself, and intensified their love and the spiritual effects of His grace on their souls by that simple act of recollection. It brings Him back to their minds and hearts as their God, their King, their Redeemer, their Mediator, their Saviour, their great Priest and Intercessor, the Captain under Whom they fight, the Leader Whom they follow, their Teacher, their Lawgiver, the Spouse and the Shepherd of their souls, their Light, their Life, the Judge before Whom they must stand, and their eternal Reward. But He is also to them the mirror of all the most glorious and winning virtues, Charity, Mercy, Kindness, Humility, Piety, Simplicity, Poverty, Chastity. It is the prerogative of love to transform those who love into the likeness of him whom they love, and as the mere name of one who is loved cannot sound in the ears or be thought of in the mind without adding to the love which is already there, so the thought of the Holy Name and the mention of the Holy Name have a kind of sacramental power in the hearts of His

saints. They seem to convey grace to think like Him, to act like Him, to sacrifice themselves to Him, to make Him known to others, and to win them also to love Him.

But the Holy Name is a name of power as well as of sweetness, as we are constantly reminded in the Sacred Scriptures themselves. His Church pleads it in all her prayers to God, as making her prayers His demands, and clothing their weakness in the might of His infinite satisfaction and resistless impetration. The faithfulness of God, Who has given us our Lord, and commanded that His Name should sum up all that He is and all that He has done, is pledged to us that the invocation of that Name shall open the gates of mercy to our prayer. The Name of Jesus unlocks all the treasures of the Divine Mercy, it stays the arm of His Justice, it turns His anger into pity, and makes His love for our Lord the measure of His compassion for us. It represents on earth the Kingdom of the Incarnation, the authority and rule of Him to Whom all power is given in Heaven and on earth. The devils flee away at the Name of Jesus. In the early days of the Church, and afterwards, amid simple populations lately converted to the faith, children could use it, as they could use the sign of the Cross, and the powers of Hell obeyed them. The Holy Name has always been the great weapon for the working of miracles of every kind, for our Lord has promised not only that the Father will grant all that we ask in His Name, but also that in His Name those who believe in Him shall cast out devils, and perform all sorts of wonders. By

virtue of this Name thousands of spiritual graces also are constantly bestowed, and it has a singular efficacy in soothing trouble, chasing away fear and despondency, and filling the heart with light and joy and strength, as was the case with our Lord's own bodily presence, as when He went up into the boat in which His disciples had been toiling against the winds and waves, and the sea fell, and the storm ceased, and they were at once at the shore.

The truth that the invocation of this Name by the children of the Church has a legitimate power over the enemies of our salvation, is proved by the anecdote in the Acts, when it was used by those who had no right to use it, and the devil turned on them saying, "Jesus I know and Paul I know, but who are you?"[3] This explains a great deal of the language of the Saints concerning the Holy Name. It is not only a Name of power and efficacy, pleading before God the infinite merits of Him Who bore it, and representing to the face of God and man Him Who has overcome Hell. It is also a token and seal of the union that makes those who believe in Him in His Church one with Him, members of His Body, of His Flesh and of His Bones, as St. Paul says. It is this union which gives to Christians a right to use it, as the children of a King have a right to use his name, and as his magistrates and officers and representatives clothe themselves by its use with his authority. It is not a charm, as if it might be used for any purpose, by persons in any moral state, or of any form of belief. But when used with faith and devotion by those who belong to our Lord, it may

3 Acts xix. 15.

have any effect connected with the work of salvation which it signifies. This is what St. Peter says of it on the first occasion when it was used as a name of power, when he healed the lame man at the Beautiful Gate. "His Name, through faith in His Name, hath made this man strong whom you have seen and know."[4] The power is in the Name, when it is used in faith. There is no limit to the occasions when it may be used with efficacy, because our Lord, in His Human Life, has touched all the circumstances of our daily existence, He has lived like one of us, to make Himself our brother, and in consequence of this there is no part of our life in which we cannot unite ourselves with Him. Thus we may take, in this sense, literally what St. Paul says to the Colossians, "All whatsoever you do in word or work, do all in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ."[5] For a devout and thoughtful interior act of union with Him in anything cannot be without its fruit in reviving all the grace which we have derived from Him, and thus the invocation of His Name at such a time has an efficacy, partly from our own devotion and faithfulness, but also from the Holy Name itself, in the sense in which St. Peter speaks. It is like the sign of the Cross, or the use of the Crucifix.

The devout St. Bernardine of Siena, it is well known, went about Italy in his career as apostolic preacher, using the devotion to this Holy Name as one of his most efficacious means for the pacification and reformation of the people. He carried it inscribed on a tablet, and spoke of it everywhere.

[4] Acts iii. 16. [5] Coloss. iii. 17.

We find among his works a long and elaborate sermon on the glories of this Holy Name, which might well be used as an epitome of all its wonderful effects. It is a treatise rather than a sermon.[6] He divides it, as is usual with him, into three articles, each of which contains four chapters. Each chapter is devoted to one "ray" of the glory of the name of Jesus. The first four chapters are for beginners, the second four for the proficient, and the third four for the perfect. The four virtues of the Holy Name for the first kind of persons are, that it shows to sinners the immense mercifulness of God, that it enables a devout man to gain a victory in every conflict, whether with the devil, the flesh, or the world, that it has the power of healing sickness when used with the requisite circumstances, and that it fills with joy and exultation those who are in any adversity.

To illustrate the first of these points, St. Bernardine lays down that to invoke the Holy Name with faith and true contrition will secure remission of sins. He quotes the words of St. Peter, in the Acts, "That through His Name all receive remission of sin, who believe in Him,"[7] and of St. John, "Your sins are forgiven you for His Name's sake,"[8] and of St. Peter on another occasion, "There is no other Name under heaven given to men whereby we must be saved."[9] But he says the Holy Name must be invoked in a perfect and devout heart, and when this is done, the external invocation increases salvation to the speaker and the hearers, even though

6 St. Bernardine, *Quadrag. de Evangelio Æterno*, Serm. xlix.
7 Acts x. 43. 8 1 St. John ii. 12. 9 Acts iv. 12.

there be already contrition in the heart. He recommends the constant use of the Holy Name for this. The second point he illustrates by an anecdote of St. Bernard, casting out a devil in our Lord's name, and by a beautiful passage from the work of the same Saint on the Canticles.[10] "Is any one of us sad? Let Jesus come into his heart, and thence mount up into his mouth, and behold, when the light of that Name arises, it scatters all the cloud and makes all calm. Does any one lose courage, and run in despair to the halter, does he not, if he call on this Name of life, at once breathe again unto life! . . . There is nothing that so well restrains the impetus of anger, that calms the swellings of pride, that heals the wound of envy, that restrains the flood of luxury, that extinguishes the flame of lust. For when I name Jesus, I set before myself One Who is meek and humble of heart, kind, temperate, chaste, merciful, conspicuous, in short, for all that is noble and holy."

In the third place, St. Bernardine tells us that the Holy Name has the power, under certain circumstances, of restoring bodily health and the like. Concupiscence and sickness remain in our nature as the effects of original sin, after the guilt of that and any other sin may have been removed. But these are the effects of sin, and so it falls under the power of our Redeemer to cancel them, if it so please Him. Therefore we may have recourse to this Name of might under such afflictions, and the experience of the Church shows that it can give light to the blind, hearing to

[10] St. Bernard, *in Cantica*. Serm. xv.

the deaf, the use of their limbs to the lame, and of their tongue to the dumb, that it can restore life to the dead, and drive out the devils from the possessed. We are not to despise the natural remedies of disease, but we may also have recourse to the invocation of the Holy Name. The Church prayed to God at the time of the beginning of the persecution of the Apostles by the Jews, that He would "stretch forth His hand to signs and cures and wonders, to be done by the Name of Thy Holy Son Jesus."[11] St. Bernardine tells us that this is often the effect of its pious invocation, though he adds that prayer to be made efficaciously must have four conditions. It must be made for ourselves, it must be made for things in order to salvation, it must be made with confidence, humility, and fervour, and it must be made with perseverance. The fourth power of the Holy Name was said to be that it fills those who are devout to it with joy and exultation under any adversity. Thus we find that the Apostles, on the occasion just now named, after they had been scourged by order of the chief priests, went forth from "the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the Name of Jesus." And he illustrates the truth from the story of St. Agatha and other martyrs.

These are the powers of the Holy Name for the beginners, but there are four others for the proficient. It is cherished in their hearts and fed upon by faith, it is taken into their mouths and preached or spoken about, it is made the spring of their actions, which then become a great accumu-

[11] Acts iv. 30.

lation of merits, it is appropriated in a new way by perseverance, and then it becomes a principle of abiding and enduring life, the remedy of the frailty and fickleness which belong to our poor nature. In the first case, it is the principle of a kind of new nobility, because it is by faith in His Name, that we have power given to us to become the sons of God. He explains in this way the celebrated passage in the Apocalypse, where the Angel forbids St. John to worship him. The conclusion seems to be that the devout use of the Holy Name may "stir up the gift that is in us," as St. Paul says, and renew and invigorate all the spiritual powers that belong to us as the sons of God.

Further still, whenever the Holy Name is taken into the mouth by preaching and spreading its honour, it is the cause of a wonderful fertility and fruitfulness in the Word of God. He illustrates this by the example of St. Paul, of whom our Lord said that he was a vessel of election to carry His Name before nations and kings and the children of Israel. For, he says, "as when a fire has been lighted, all the dryness and uselessness of thorns and briars are consumed, and the fields are purged of them, and as when the rising of the sun's rays drives to their dens the thieves and wanderers and plunderers of the night, so the tongue of Paul when he spoke to the people sounded as a thunder, or came over them like a great fire, or like the sun shining in its brightness. Then infidelity was burnt up, then falsehoods vanished, then the truth shone forth, for the Name of Jesus was spread abroad everywhere by means of his words and epistles, his example and his miracles.

For St. Paul was always using and praising the Holy Name of Jesus, he bore it before nations and kings, and the children of Israel as a great light, crying out that 'the night is passed, and the day is at hand, let us cast away the works of darkness and put on the armour of light,'[12] and the rest. He showed to all men his light as of a burning and shining candle placed on high in a candlestick, preaching everywhere Jesus and Him crucified." We may perhaps think that the blessed preacher of Siena may here have been describing himself as well as St. Paul, and he evidently dwells with a particular pleasure on this fruitfulness of the word of God preached by one who was full of devotion to the Holy Name.

He goes on thirdly to speak of the rich treasures contained in it, when it is made the principle of action, founding his words on the text that "no man can say the Lord Jesus but by the Holy Ghost,"[13] and every action and word that comes from the Holy Ghost is meritorious of eternal life. What seems to be meant is something of this sort. The devout invocation of the Holy Name revives in the heart and mind our devotion and love for our Lord, and is at the same time, an act which touches this most loving and compassionate Heart, so that the result is a greater union between Him and us, which is seen in a greater richness of grace poured out on us, for the purpose of those works which we do in union with Him and in the power of His Holy Name, as belonging to Him.

On the fourth fruit of these powers which it contains for the proficient, St. Bernardine dwells at

[12] Rom. xiii. 12. [13] 1 Cor. xii. 3

length, taking as his text, so to say, the words of St. Bernard, "Art thou not refreshed as often as thou rememberest the Name of Jesus? What is there equal to it for the feeding the mind that thinks of it, for repairing weariness, for strengthening virtues, for nourishing good and upright manners, for fostering chaste affections? For," he says, "if you are at a standstill because of the sluggishness of your mind, Jesus heals you by awakening your fervour." And again he quotes another beautiful passage of the same Saint. "It often occurs to us," he says, "that we are filled with weariness and depressed by the languor of sadness. We are dry, our cell is a torment, reading is unpleasant, the mind wanders, we feel nothing but torpor and coldness, and though we prolong our prayer ever so much, it is only to be weighed down by tepidity, and not raised by the sweetness of consolation. The lethargy of that slumber is not to be banished or put to flight by the thought of the Kingdom of Heaven, or by the fear of the punishments of Hell. And then after a short interval of time we invoke Jesus with all our heart, while we are sitting in solitude. And behold there comes over us a quickness and vigour of joy so great that the tongue speaks not, nor can it be explained by a long discourse, but the narrowness of human sense is surpassed, the faculties are collected, and the mind is irradiated as by the infusion of a wonderful light, or intoxicated as by the draught of some precious wine. It is filled with joy so great, as in a moment of time, that there is nothing that it prefers or can compare to the delights and goods and sweetness which it experiences. And I think," he adds, "that

all that sadness showed the absence of Jesus from some secret cause, and the invocation of the Name of Jesus with humble desire called back our joy in secret and in silence, together with the presence of Jesus. Jesus was not there, and Lazarus died, and the house was filled with grief. But behold, Jesus enters, the sisters are consoled by His presence, and Lazarus returns to life." [14]

In the third part of the same discourse, St. Bernardine speaks of the fruits of the Holy Name for those whom he calls the perfect. The first of these is the sweetness with which those who meditate upon it are filled, according to the beautiful rhythm of St. Bernard, *Jesu dulcis memoria*. The second is the wonderful power which this Holy Name gives to the prayers and petitions of the devout soul. The third is the immense sweetness with which those who contemplate it are filled. With regard to them, the remark already made may be repeated. The reason for these results is because the thought of our Lord, and all that He is to us, is renewed by the Holy Name, and thus the mind and heart are kindled with new fervour, and because, in the second place, the devout invocation of the Holy Name brings down on the loving soul the gracious regard of our Lord Himself. The fourth fruit is the triumph and glory which it will produce in the state of glory. Those who live eternally will have no forgetfulness of anything, those who enjoy the truth will have no possibility of error, those who are absorbed in Divine charity will have no impulses of cupidity. Those who love the Name of Jesus

[14] St. Bernard. *in Cantica*. xv.

will have in their intelligence the clear vision of the most splendid truth for the merit of their faith, in their memory the possession for ever of the most immense majesty for the merit of their hope, and in their will they will have the love and fruition of the most sweet goodness for the merit of their love for His Name, according to the Psalm: "They shall glory in Thee, all who love Thy Name."[15] And thus for the sake of the Name of Jesus the whole soul will live, and be endowed and enriched and beatified with all its powers, it will be made like to God Three and One, united to Him, enlightened by Him, and plunged in perfect peace through Him, for it is to live for ever in the state of perfect bliss, furnished with the accumulation of all kinds of good.

These considerations are very short and imperfect, if they are compared to the importance of the works of God which are summed up in the mystery of the Circumcision of our Lord. But they may at least serve to show how very great and how pregnant in their consequences and fruits these works were. Within a few days of the Birth of our Lord, He had already shed His Blood, and by so doing He had ratified and filled with heavenly power a sacred rite which, in the ages before He came, had fitted thousands upon thousands for admission into the Eternal Kingdom, much as Baptism was to do the same in the ages which were to follow. The holy rite was not a sacrament, but it was, in the counsels of God, an essential condition for some of the effects which were afterwards to be

[15] Psalm v. 12.

conveyed by the great Christian sacrament. A few drops of Blood shed in the little chamber in Bethlehem had been the figure and the application of the Sacrifice of the Cross, and their effects had stretched back over a long series of generations. More than this, the spiritual renovation and transformation of man by means of the grace of the Cross had been foreshadowed in the same simple ceremony. Then, the whole had been crowned by the giving to the Infant Saviour the Name which signified at once the extremity of His humiliation in becoming Man for us, and the boundless efficacy of the redemption which as Man He was to work for us, the Name which is above every name, and at which, according to the decree of God, every knee is to bow in Heaven and on earth and under the earth.

Two more remarks may be made, before we conclude this account of the Naming of our Lord. In the first place, it is probable that this first formal taking on Himself of the Holy Name must have been the beginning of a constant and familiar use of it in the Holy Family, and with them it must have been used with a perpetual sense of its Divine meaning present to their minds, so that at every mention of it there must have been a renewal of the joy with which it was first given, and a revival of grace, in reward for the affection with which it was pronounced. It was probably out of reverence that it was not always used to our Lord, for our Lady seems to have called Him "Son," as He called her Woman or Lady. But we gather from the Gospels that it was the common way among the early dis-

ciples to speak of Him as Jesus, though in addressing Him they would use the name Master, and the like. It was to them more than an appellative, for its very sound recalled to them His office and work and dignity as the Lamb of God, as its first giving to Him was connected with the first shedding of His Precious Blood. Again, the mystery of the Circumcision and Naming of our Lord must have been one of the occasions in which our Blessed Lady and St. Joseph would probably receive large increases of grace, as it was the rule for God to mark every onward step in the working out of the great mystery of the Incarnation with fresh bounties of this kind. The Name had long been the treasure of the hearts of our Lady and her blessed Spouse, to both of whom it had been revealed. And now that the time had come when they could use it of Him with full right, it must have been the cause of singular joy to them as connected with the great favours of which it reminded them. Thus the Evangelist specially mentions that "He was so named of the Angel before He was conceived in the womb," as if to record our Lady's grateful remembrance of the promise which had been so faithfully and so bountifully fulfilled. Mary and Joseph began and handed on to the Church the devotion to the Holy Name, and His loving foreknowledge of all the joy and all the blessings with which that devotion was to be rewarded would be, from the very first, a great consolation to His Sacred Heart.

CHAPTER V.

THE PURIFICATION.

St. Luke ii. 22—39; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 11.

AFTER the mystery of the Circumcision of our Lord, the veil again falls over the history of the Holy Family. The Circumcision had decided the general rule which was to be observed by St. Joseph as to all the obligations and injunctions of the Law. Circumcision was not indeed itself a part of the Law, in the sense that its obligation rested upon the Law. It was the condition of the covenant of God with Abraham, not a fresh enactment made at Mount Sinai. But it had been ruled, so to say, for many Divine reasons, some of which we have been considering in the last chapter, that the Infant Saviour of the world should be circumcised, although the great reason for which the rite had been instituted had no place in Him. St. Paul, as has been said, argues in one place that a circumcised man became subject to the obligation of the whole Law.[1] It is not necessary here to examine the full meaning of this statement, or the sense in which it is urged by the Apostle. But it was enough for St. Joseph to follow, in the case of

[1] Gal. v. 3.

the Blessed Mother, the rule which he had followed in the case of her Child. According to that rule she would have to be purified according to the Law of Moses, framed for all mothers who had borne children in the ordinary way. Moreover, there was another law which bound her Child, as well as that which applied to herself. For the Law required that every first-born son "that openeth the womb" of his mother should be redeemed in the Temple. That is, all the first-born belonged by right to God, and a small tax had to be paid as a ransom, or bringing back of such, that they might belong to their parents again. The regulations, in both these cases, were laid down with great precision in the Law, and St. Joseph could not but be eager to fulfil them.

"And after the days of her Purification, according to the Law of Moses, were accomplished, they carried Him to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord, as it is written in the Law of the Lord, that every male opening the womb shall be called holy to the Lord, and to offer a sacrifice according as it is written in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons." Thus, what was obligatory in the case of the Blessed Mother, or rather what would have been obligatory, if she had been like other mothers of the holy people, was that she could not enter the Temple, remaining under the ban of legal impurity for the required number of days, and that then she should present herself at the door, and make the requisite offering, after which the priest was to pray for her, and she was to be considered clean. What was required in the

case of the first-born male child was that it should be redeemed by the payment of the small tax already mentioned. The two rites were naturally connected, and the space of time which was to elapse according to the Law, before the Purification of the Mother, fixed the date of the Presentation of the Son and His redemption by an offering.

The grounds on which these two obligations rested were different. The rules for Purification applied to all mothers who had become mothers in the ordinary way, and they formed a part of the system of ceremonial observances which were devised for marking, in the first instance, the natural defilements and physical infirmities, by which childbirth is preceded and accompanied, as things which are more or less connected with original sin, and which require some kind of atonement and purification, before the person in whom they have taken place can be considered altogether clean, fit to enter the Temple of God, and take part in all the worship and devotions of the holy nation. The period of legal uncleanness lasted for forty days, when the child was male, and for a period twice as long when the child was a girl.

It is needless to say, that all these legal uncleannesses had no foundation at all in the case of the Blessed Mother of our Lord. She was herself free from the stain of original sin, as of actual sin. She had conceived our Lord by the operation of the Holy Ghost. He had come into the world, leaving her a most pure and perfect Virgin, and the Birth had been altogether most pure and heavenly, utterly free from anything in her or Him in which the

reason for these legal purifications could be found. So far, then, it might have seemed that there was no occasion for our Lady to be as other women in this respect. The very letter of the Law did not bind her, for the conditions laid down by that letter were not verified in her. It might have seemed as if the Lawgiver himself had had her case in view, and had so arranged the words of the prescription in question as to leave her untouched. Thus neither the reason of the commandment, nor the commandment itself, applied to her.

The law relating to the redemption of the first-born rested on a different foundation. It was enacted before the Israelites left Egypt, and it was based on the destruction of all the first-born among the Egyptians as a last plague, to force the hard heart of Pharaoh to obedience to the will of God in letting the Israelites depart. Then, before the people had crossed the Red Sea, and before the final destruction of Pharaoh and his army in its waves, Moses had been commanded to instruct the people on this point. "When the Lord shall have brought thee into the land of the Chanaanite, as He swore to thee and to thy fathers, and shall give it to thee, thou shalt set apart all that openeth the womb for the Lord, and all that is first brought forth of thy cattle, whatsoever thou shalt have of the male sex, thou shalt consecrate to the Lord. And every first-born of men thou shalt redeem with a price. And when thy son shall ask thee to-morrow, What is this? thou shalt answer him, With a strong hand did the Lord bring us forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage; for when Pharaoh was

hardened, and would not let us go, the Lord slew every first-born in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of man to the first-born of beasts, therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all that openeth the womb of the male sex, and all the first-born of my sons I redeem." [2]

The Sacred Text goes on to set forth the purpose for which this enactment was made by God. "It shall be as a sign in thy hand, and as a thing hung between thine eyes, for a remembrance, because the Lord hath brought us forth out of Egypt with a strong hand." If the ceremony of the redemption of the first-born had always been accompanied with a lively and grateful recollection of the singular benefits which God had conferred upon His chosen people, it would have been a continual spur to the devotion and faithfulness of the Israelites to His Law. More than that, it would have reminded them, not only of the deliverance from Egypt, but of the significant circumstances of that deliverance. It would have brought to mind the slaying of the paschal lamb, and the sprinkling of its blood upon the doorposts of the houses in which the Israelites dwelt, that the exterminating angel might pass on, and spare the children within. Thus the redemption of mankind by the Blood of the Immaculate Lamb of God would have been kept perpetually before the minds of the people, there would have been in every family one at least who might be said to represent the principle of redemption, and when our Lord came to die on the Cross, that feature of God's rule in dealing with mankind which consisted

[2] Exodus xiii. 11—15.

in the requirement of so ineffable a Sacrifice would have been a sign of the faithfulness of God instead of a stumbling-block to the people.

Such being the ground of these two precepts of the Law, it is clear that there could be no reason, beyond the simple letter, even if any in that, for the submission to these prescriptions of our Blessed Lady and her Divine Child. Hers was a child-bearing altogether heavenly and immaculate, and He, as her First-born, needed no redemption to set Him free from the obligation of belonging entirely to God, for He came into the world for the one express purpose of serving God most perfectly from the first moment of His Life to the last, and of setting all the world free from the more than Egyptian bondage of sin. He was the Redeemer, not the redeemed, He was Himself the Lamb without spot or blemish, by virtue of Whose Blood all were to be saved who were to have any part in salvation. The first-born of the tribe of Levi were not redeemed by their parents, because they were to be all their lives addicted to the service of God in the Temple and elsewhere. Though our Lord did not belong to the tribe of Levi, still He was the Great High Priest, Himself the Priest and the Sacrifice of the New and Eternal Law. Whatever spiritual blessings and efficacy might be connected with the ministrations of the Levites and priests at the altar, were all derived from Him, and imparted on condition of faith in Him.

But the Providence of God had ruled that Mary should be purified like other mothers, and that her Son should be redeemed like other first-born, for

many Divine reasons. For our Lord always reverenced the laws which His Father had made, even though they were not for Him. He had a special love for the virtue of obedience, by means of which He was to redeem the world, and cancel all the effects of the disobedience of Adam. It rejoiced His Heart, moreover, to renew in His own Person the grateful acknowledgment of the mercies which had been shown by God to the chosen people, to which He Himself belonged after the flesh. And much more was He continually rejoicing over and thanking God for the spiritual redemption and deliverance of which that old history was a figure, and which He was Himself to accomplish. Our Blessed Lady, moreover, could rejoice to be as other women in respect of her Purification, in which something of the healing power of the Precious Blood was applied in the sacrifice offered, and in which great homage and a humble acknowledgment of perfect dependence and subjection were offered to God. As our Lord in His Circumcision took on Himself the position and character of one born in original sin, so it would be a delight to His Mother to wear the same character in her Purification.

Her presence there was thus at once an act of obedience and of humility. She obeyed a law by which she was not bound, and she made profession of a state of legal impurity which did not belong to her. It was such a profession to take her stand at the portal of the Temple, to be admitted only after the sacred rite had been performed, and the like. She showed her love for the sacred precincts, and for the privileges of the chosen people, in presenting

herself, while there was also a further profession of poverty and of love of purity in her offering. Thus every action in this sacred mystery had its holy character. The redemption of our Lord by His Mother was very significant also, because it represented, as we have seen, the effects of the blood of the lamb with which the doorposts of the Israelites were marked in order to save the children from the sword of the exterminating angel. All that efficacy was derived from the representation, by means of that blood, of the ransom which was to be paid for our sins on the Cross.

It must also have been a great joy to our Lord to present Himself for the first time, in the Temple, to His Eternal Father, to acknowledge His absolute dependence on Him, and to offer Himself there for the great work for which He came into the world. And if this was so with Him, so also would it be a joy and solemn delight to our Blessed Lady to do her part in this solemn Presentation. "I rejoiced," says one of the Gradual Psalms, "at the things that were said to me, We shall go into the house of the Lord!"[3] and the thoughts which follow in that beautiful canticle must have been in her heart while they were on their way to Jerusalem. It was the first time they had gone to the Holy City since the ineffable blessing of the Birth of our Lord. He had to offer Himself to His Father, she had to give thanks for the accomplishment of the promises made to her, and St. Joseph also had to pour out his grateful heart to God Who had chosen him for so high an office, and enabled him hitherto to discharge

3 Psalm cxxi. 1.

it with faithfulness and success. And in all this we see, not only what any bystander might have seen, the careful fulfilment of and obedience to all the prescriptions of the Law, but also that "fulfilling" of the Law in another and a higher sense, of which our Lord seems to have spoken to St. John, at the time of His own Baptism. For it was by our Lord's Baptism that water was consecrated for the sacrament of regeneration. It was by our Lord's Circumcision that efficacy was connected with that rite for the cancelling of original sin. So it was by the fulfilment on the part of our Lord, and His Blessed Mother, of these prescriptions of the Law, that they had allied to them the blessings which had been imparted, in a long series of generations, to those who had faithfully observed them.

Thus in itself to our Lord and to the two holy souls by His side, Mary and Joseph, the occasion of the Purification was one of intense joy. They are the patterns of the devout class of Christian souls who do not ask whether a holy rite, such as the hearing of Mass, is of obligation on them or not, but whether it is possible for them to avail themselves of the opportunities afforded them for such a service to God and so much benefit to their own souls, without any interference with other duties of their station. It was enough that they had the opportunity. The rule of the Law of God was a privilege to them, as the religious duties of Catholics are privileges to the devout. To breathe the air of the house of God, to be present where He was praised and worshipped according to His own institution, to unite themselves with the crowds of

other worshippers, and so to enjoy the blessings of the great people of God, were things from which they needed rather something to restrain them when it was necessary, than anything to drive them when it was possible to enjoy them. But at the same time there were the Divine reasons already mentioned why these solemn mysteries should have their place in the life of our Lord and of His Blessed Mother, not merely for the example of obedience and piety which they contain, but also on account of their relation to the counsels and institutions of God.

To the outward eye, there was no pomp or ceremony about this great mystery of the Purification. St. Joseph took our Lady and the Blessed Child, as any other poor man might have taken them, along the few miles of road between Bethlehem and Jerusalem, and made his way, unobserved amid the crowd of worshippers, to that part of the Temple which the women might enter for purposes like that of Mary. It was easy to procure the simple offering prescribed for the poor, a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons. The ceremony would not create excitement or arouse more attention than the "churching" of a young mother in one of our own chapels. Mary may have been but one of many mothers who came for the same purpose. The offering was soon made, the prayers were soon said, the money for the redemption tax was soon paid. Yet that was by far the most glorious moment in the history of that Temple, a moment, indeed, which raised its glories to a higher level than those even of the first Temple of Solomon. "Yet a little while,'

God had said by the Prophet Aggeus,[4] "and I will move the heavens and the earth, and the sea and the dry land. And I will move all nations, and the Desired of all nations shall come, and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts. . . . Great shall be the glory of this House, more than of the first, saith the Lord of hosts, and in this place I will give peace, saith the Lord of hosts."

It is remarkable that the prophetic descriptions of this coming of our Lord to His Temple should be so full of words which express His majesty and power, rather than His humility and meekness, the lowliness of His appearance, and the simple poverty of those in whose charge He came. Yet so it was in truth, and so His coming is described in the other great prophetical passage which is referred to by the Church in this connexion. Malachias, the last of the prophets, mingles up, as has already been remarked, the two advents of our Lord in His prophecy. Thus it is natural that he should add many words which signify rather the terrors of the last coming than the humility and gentleness of the first. "And presently the Lord Whom you seek, and the Angel of the Testament Whom you desire, shall come to His Temple. Behold He cometh! saith the Lord of Hosts. And who shall be able to think of the day of His coming, and who shall stand to see Him? for He is like a refining fire and like the fuller's herb."[5] But the Holy Ghost may mean us to discern the truth, that in all the advents and visitations of our Lord, whether He comes in majesty or in meekness, in power or in humility,

4 Aggeus ii. 6—9. 5 Mal. iii. 1, 2.

there is this character of searching justice and severe purity, before which everything that is in any way unworthy of His presence withers up and is scorched to dust as before a purifying fire. Thus He is as terrible in the arms of Mary, as on the throne of judgment, for "His eyes," as the prophet says, "are too pure to behold evil, and He cannot look on sin." [6]

Some of the writers on this mystery of the Purification have found a difficulty in the fact that the offering made by our Blessed Lady was the offering of the poor. The law prescribed in the case of a mother who was to be purified, that she shall bring to the door of the Tabernacle of the testimony a lamb of a year old for a holocaust, and a young pigeon or a turtle for sin, and shall deliver them to the priest. . . . And if her hand find not sufficiency, and she is not able to offer a lamb, she shall take two turtles or two young pigeons, one for a holocaust and another for sin, and the priest shall pray for her and so she shall be cleansed."[7] The difficulty is supposed to lie in the fact that, the Epiphany having lately taken place, our Lady must have had the treasures offered to our Lord by the Wise Kings, and thus could not have been unable to pay the more costly offering. But it seems most certain that the mystery of the Purification preceded the Epiphany by a considerable space of time. Probably also the offering would be made according to the general condition and state of the family, and it might have seemed ostentatious of one in the position of our Blessed Lady to make the richer

6 Hab. i. 13. 7 Lev. xii. 6—8.

offering. In truth, she needed, as has been said, no purification, and she brought with her, on that occasion, and offered to the Temple, the true Lamb of God, in Whom all these ceremonial prescriptions were fulfilled. Moreover, it is not improbable that by the time of which we speak there may have sprung up a kind of recognized custom, by which the less expensive offering was the one commonly made, even by those who might have had the means of making the other. Thus, even if our Blessed Lady had been possessed of the gold offered by the Wise Kings, it would not follow that she would think it better to use it for this costlier offering, rather than for almsgiving to others poorer than herself, or any other such good purpose.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CANTICLE OF SIMEON.

St. Luke ii. 25—32; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 11.

THE Providence of God was not to leave this first appearance of the Saviour of the world in the Temple without its due honour. God had arranged that, although no crowds of enthusiastic disciples went forth from the city to meet Him, and to accompany His footsteps into the holy place with shouts and songs of joy, although the official rulers and guardians of the sacred shrine paid Him no homage, while the secular princes and governors were altogether indifferent to Him, He should not be left without the acknowledgments of the purest and noblest souls that earth then contained. He was borne in the arms of His glorious Mother, with her Spouse walking humbly by her side. No doubt thousands of angels accompanied Him, and called on their brethren, the guardians of His Temple, to lift up their gates and admit the King of Glory. Besides these, however, God had His chosen witnesses and servants, and by a singular Providence they came instinctively to the Temple at the moment when the Holy Family were there to worship. For, apart from all else, the Presentation of our Lord

had been a further act of self-humiliation on His part, following on the abasement of the Circumcision. It was therefore in accordance with the holy rules of God's dealings with Him, that having humbled Himself, He should be honoured and exalted.

St. Luke's account of this incident, which, like all this part of his Gospel, may be considered as coming from our Blessed Lady herself, is as follows: "Behold, there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Ghost was in him. And he had received an answer from the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord." It is natural that Christian students should have searched the Jewish records for any traces of this servant of God. It seems that there was a very famous Simeon about this time, the son of Hillel and the father of Gamaliel, a man of great authority and reputation, who, a little later than this, was made chief of the Sanhedrin. There is no reason why this should not be the person here named. It is said that he was not in extreme old age at this time. But we are all accustomed to look on this Simeon as old, probably on account of the words of the Evangelist, who states that he had received a promise that he should not die before he had seen the Christ. Simeon's own words, in the Canticle which he now uttered, seem also to imply that he expected now to die soon. But words like those of the promise made to Simeon are used by our Lord Himself of the Apostles before the Transfiguration. "Amen, I say

to you, there are some of them that stand here that shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom."[1] Yet the Transfiguration, which was the fulfilment of this promise, took place a week after the words were spoken by our Lord, and none of the Apostles were at all old men at that time.

The Evangelist draws for us the character of this holy man in a very few words. He was a just man, a man fearing God, that is devout, a man who was expecting or looking out for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Ghost was in him. The justice which is attributed to him, as to others in the Gospels, seems to mean that he was generally and perfectly virtuous, giving both to God and to man their due. The word may be taken also in the more restricted sense, meaning that he was a man who was upright and just in all his dealings with others, and in this sense it may be thought that the second quality attributed to him, of devotion founded on the holy fear of God, is meant to complete the picture by adding the perfection of his behaviour towards God to that of his excellent virtue in relation to men. The Evangelist seems to describe him as a man given to religion, piety, worship, prayer, contemplation, not simply a religious man in the sense in which all good men are religious. He was probably a priest, though St. Luke does not use the title of him. His action in taking our Lord into his arms, and in blessing the holy parents, and the like, seems to imply that he was very high in the priesthood. After the phrase which denotes his religious-

[1] St. Matt. xvi. 28.

ness and devotion, St. Luke adds that he was "looking for the consolation of Israel." That is, he was one of the many devout souls who were at that time to be found in the holy nation, whom the study of the prophecies and the sacred traditions of the race, combined with the signs of the times, such as the political condition of the Jews, and the like, had led to see that the moment fixed for the fulfilment of the promise concerning the advent of the Messias must be near at hand. This conviction must have been accompanied, in the case of such persons, with a very intense longing for the promised advent. They not merely believed and hoped in it, but they had learnt to think that it might now come about at any time, and were ready to catch at any sign of God's Providential action which might seem to belong to its accomplishment.

This advent of the Messias was, to the minds and hearts of persons of this class, what St. Luke calls it, "the consolation of Israel." The words probably were in ordinary use among them at the time, and their occurrence here is another sign that St. Luke is using a narrative which came to his hands directly from one familiar with such persons, such as our Blessed Lady herself. It would be to give a false and inadequate account of the state of mind of these devout Jews to imagine that they were longing for the temporal deliverance of the people from the Roman yoke, and a kingdom of the Messias which should restore and carry to a still higher stage the glories of the reigns of David and Solomon. We cannot tell, indeed, how far, in any particular case, the spiritual character of our Lord's

work and office were understood. But the words in which the expectation of these holy souls is described appear to be taken from some of the prophecies of Isaias, which certainly bring out very fully the spiritual glories of the promised redemption: "Be comforted, be comforted, My people, saith your God. Speak ye to the heart of Jerusalem, and call to her, for her evil is at an end, her iniquity is forgiven, she hath received from the hand of the Lord double for all her sins."[2] The same strain is found in other predictions of the same Prophet, and it is not easy to suppose that a man so enlightened as this holy Simeon, and others like him, would have failed to discern that spiritual blessings were the chief subject of such prophecies. He was expecting, then, as an event which must in any case be near at hand, the advent of the Messias, with a full intelligence of the true character of the benefits which were to follow from that advent.

St. Luke adds that the Holy Ghost was with him, meaning, probably, not only that Simeon, like other just and pious persons, was guided and illuminated by the Holy Ghost, and a large recipient of His graces, but that the Holy Ghost was with him in those special gifts of spiritual discernment, intelligence of prophecy, and prevision of things future, which form the foundation of the prophetic gift, properly so called. He goes on to add that it had been revealed to him by the Holy Ghost that he should not see death until he had seen the Christ of the Lord. The Latin translation of the Greek word here used brings in the idea of an "answer" to

[2] Isaias xl. 1, 2.

prayer or earnest desire. There may have been constant prayer, and earnest desire, in this and in other cases where the same word is used. But its proper sense only implies that the knowledge came to Him in some Divine manner, like the revelation made to the Wise Kings after the Epiphany, that they were not to return to Herod. No doubt, holy Simeon's great longing was to live in the days when the Messias should appear. In answer, as it were, to this desire, the revelation had been made to him, that the Messias should appear before he came himself to die, and that he should have the blessing of beholding Him.

The promise mentioned by St. Luke seems to have been made to a soul that was very eager in his desire to see the Blessed Child, and it is the way of God to console His servants by promises of this sort, which are often fulfilled much sooner than those expect to whom they are made. It is not, therefore, a conclusive argument, that the Simeon who was the son of Hillel and father of Gamaliel was alive some few years after this date. St. Luke mentions Gamaliel with honour in the Acts, and there are some traces of a familiarity on the part of the Evangelist with the Jewish scribes and learned men of this school, to which St. Paul, for whose converts this Gospel was primarily intended, himself belonged. The great position of Gamaliel, the son of the Simeon of whom history speaks, may have been a hindrance to his conversion until some time after the death of St. Stephen, as we see that such is constantly the case with people of high reputation and authority. But it may at least have counted

something with him, that his father—if this Simeon was his father—had met the Child Jesus in the Temple at the Purification. And Gamaliel, as we know, not only moderated the persecuting frenzy of the extreme party most effectually, but ultimately joined the Church, and is numbered among her saints. There would be a beautiful sequel to this history, if we could suppose his father to have been the Simeon here mentioned.

In any case, the mention of this holy Simeon and of Anna "the prophetess," of whom we shall speak presently, shows us that there existed in Jerusalem at this time a number of devout and holy persons, who are spoken of as those who were looking for the redemption of Israel. In such a city there were sure to be a considerable number of such persons. The Temple, with its perpetual succession of holy services, drew to itself a number of constant worshippers. They were not of necessity priests, or scribes, or learned persons, but the devout souls of all classes, who lead a retired life, a life of prayer, of mortification, of almsdeeds, and of close union with God. They were more precious in the eyes of Heaven than the ecclesiastics at the head of the Hierarchy, who were often hypocritical in their lives, full of personal ambition, covetousness, impurity, using their great position and sacred character for their own advancement, and even for the satisfaction of their own passions. We know too well how many such men there were among the ecclesiastical rulers at Jerusalem.

But their existence, and even the scandal of their lives, and the injury done to religion thereby, did

not shut out from the Temple of God, much less from close communion with Him, the large class of devout souls of whom we are now speaking. And it was in the counsels of God that these should be brought into relation, so to say, with the Holy Family and the Divine Child, on the solemn occasion of His first appearance in the Temple and in the Holy City. It must be remembered all through the history of our Lord, that this class was in existence around the Holy Places. They do not come forward publicly in open resistance to the extreme and dominant party under Annas and Caiphas. They were probably in a large minority, and persons of such lives do not commonly make themselves conspicuous in great assemblies, such as the Sanhedrin. But they were well disposed to receive our Lord, although they may, as a class, have hung back from open adherence to Him, perplexed by the fact that the rulers of the people and the chief ecclesiastics were so settled in their opposition to Him. Nicodemus was one of these, and Joseph of Arimathea, and perhaps Gamaliel, and when three such men can be found, to a certain extent, prominent in the history, we may be very certain that there were many more like them who are not named.

"And he came by the Spirit into the Temple. And when His parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the Law, he also took Him into his arms, and blessed God." Such men as Simeon are constantly guided in what appear indifferent actions by the Holy Ghost, Who communicates Himself habitually to them, and inspires them to this or that action or step in their

daily life. Thus it was, that without any announcement of the Birth of our Lord, without, as it seems, any communication with the Shepherds, or those who had heard from them of the vision of the Angels, this blessed old man came into the Temple at the time of the Presentation of our Lord. There are legends which speak of a bright crown of light which marked out our Blessed Lady, as she stood humbly among the women, or of a radiance which streamed from the face of the Infant Saviour Whom she held in her arms. The Gospel story says nothing of this, and though there may have been some sign like that which was given to St. John Baptist, by which he was to know the Baptizer in the Holy Ghost, still without any sign that Divine Spirit might quicken the spiritual perceptions and instincts of a soul so dear to Him, so that he may have needed nothing more to enable him to discern our Lord.

"And, when His parents brought in the Child Jesus to do for Him according to the custom of the Law, he also took Him in his arms, and said, Now Thou dost dismiss Thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word, in peace! because my eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to the revelation of the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel." It would appear, as has been said, from the action of Simeon, that he was a person of known dignity and authority, such a one as to be able without any questioning to take the Child that was presented to God from His Mother's arms into his own. Although the incident must have passed quickly, and thus

may have been unobserved by the greater number of those who were present, there is still a certain solemnity about it, which makes it likely that Simeon held some official rank in the Temple itself.

His canticle crowns, so to say, the cycle of the Evangelical canticles, and takes up the thought of the mercies of God to the world where the same subject had been left in the *Benedictus*, as that again had been a kind of continuation of the *Magnificat*. The language is throughout based on passages of the Old Testament, and can hardly be understood without this principle. Simeon begins by blessing God, that is, by thanking Him, praising Him, acknowledging His goodness, and praying that His glory may be advanced. The special subject of this thanksgiving and blessing is, in the first instance, the fulfilment of the promise which had been made to himself personally, namely, that he should see the Christ of the Lord before he died. The words, "Now dost Thou dismiss Thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word, in peace," are founded on the language of Jacob to his long lost son Joseph, "Now shall I die with joy, because I have seen thy face, and leave thee alive,"[3] and are still more closely an echo of the words of the elder Tobias, "Now, O Lord, do with me according to Thy will, and command my spirit to be received in peace."[4] The devout children of Abraham and Israel could die in peace, because they had the promise of redemption on the condition of faith, and that, with repentance, was sufficient for salvation, while their original sin had been cancelled, as far as it excluded from Heaven, in the holy rite of

3 Gen. xlvi. 30. 4 Tobias iii. 6.

Circumcision, through the merits of our Lord. The anxiety of this good man to see the Consolation of Israel had been satisfied by the grace vouchsafed to him on this occasion. If he had feared death, that fear was taken away, because he had seen our Lord. If he had been afflicted, on account of the miserable state of the holy people, he was now at peace, for their true Deliverer had come, and his heart was therefore full of joy. He could die in peace, the death of the just, and feel secure of his future bliss.

What a holy soul like this would have been longing and praying for all his life, would not have been any merely personal security of salvation, which indeed an Israelite full of faith might have had without any personal knowledge of and contact with this promised Saviour. The "salvation of God" is a phrase constantly repeated from time to time in the books of the Old Testament Scriptures, and it signifies the Redeemer and His work, the Kingdom which He was to found, in which and by means of which the souls of all believers were to find peace. The devout Jew looked forward to the Church, in the same way as the devout Christian finds his delight and peace in the Church, though the lineaments and features of the great system which was to enshrine the benefits of Redemption might have been very imperfectly discerned in the dim light of prophecy by the eyes of those who had nothing more to guide them. But we find Simeon grasping at once those great characteristics of the Church, which he had learnt from prophecy, but which were not at once accepted, in its true sense, by the Jews of that time.

After his first words, the holy Simeon passes on immediately, beyond his own personal blessings, to speak of the great mercy which God had now fulfilled to His people, and not to His people only, but to the whole world. This had been included, even as to the blessing of the Gentiles, in the *Magnificat*, because our Blessed Lady had spoken of the fulfilment of the promises made to Abraham and his seed, and a part of these promises was that in them all the nations of the earth were to be blessed. But it had not been spoken of directly and explicitly by her, and in the *Benedictus* St. Zachary had also hinted at it, without making it the chief subject of his thanksgiving. He had hinted at it when he had said, at the end of his canticle, that "the Orient from on high" had visited them, "to enlighten them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to direct our feet into the way of peace." But this thought, which lies wrapped up in the words both of our Blessed Lady and St. Zachary, is made the prominent feature in this third canticle. St. Simeon speaks of the salvation, "which Thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to the revelation of the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel." This is a step beyond the direct and explicit subject of the *Benedictus*, and the language now used seems to cover the whole history of the Kingdom of our Lord on earth, which began with the admission of the Gentiles and is to end by the return and conversion of the elder people of God.

Here, again, the words are founded on the language of the Prophets. It is very likely, indeed, that Simeon had in his mind the prophecy of Aggeus,

already quoted, in which our Lord is spoken of as the "Desired of all nations," and in which it is promised that in that Temple God will give peace. The Psalmist had sung, "The Lord hath made known His salvation, He hath revealed His justice in the sight of the Gentiles,"[5] and these words suggest the sense in which we are to understand the verse before us. "The revelation of the Gentiles" means the manifestation to the Gentiles of the salvation and justice of God. The idea of "light" may be taken from the prophecy of Isaias: "I have given Thee for a covenant of the people, for a light to the Gentiles, that Thou mightest open the eyes of the blind, and bring forth the prisoner out of the prison house."[6] The words about the glory of Israel are found a little later in the same prophetical book: "The Lord hath redeemed Jacob, and Israel shall be glorified."[7]

This, then, is the great subject of the thanksgiving of the canticle. And when it is said that this great salvation is prepared "before the face" of all peoples, it seems to be meant that it is not only manifested to them, but offered to them, as when it is said in Sacred Scripture, "Before man is life and death, good and evil, that which he shall choose shall be given him."[8] And in the declaration of the freedom with which all nations may choose the salvation of God, if they will, is included the promise of abundant grace to enable them so to choose and to persevere in the faithful execution of their choice. It seems natural, also, that this most distinct declaration of

5 Psalm xcvii. 2.
6 Isaias xlii. 6, 7.
7 Isaias xliv. 23.
8 Ecclus. xv. 18.

the extension of the Kingdom of Redemption to the heathen world should have been made at the close of the Evangelical canticles, and should have been uttered also on the first appearance of our Lord as a Child in the Temple. For, in the passage already quoted from the prophetical books, we have seen how the Lord, Who was to come, is spoken of as the Desire of all nations. And, indeed, the pre-eminent glory of that second House was to be that in it peace was to be given, the peace of which St. Paul speaks between those who had formerly been outside, and those who have been included in, the Covenant, as well as the larger and more general peace between God and man. The salvation so long promised by God has come, and it has come to all the world, it is refused to none. The Gentiles lacked the light of faith, and to them the salvation comes as an illumination, in the first instance. The Jews inherited the faith, and to them the promised salvation comes in gifts of grace and glory based upon their faith.

The Evangelist goes on to speak of the wonder of our Blessed Lady and St. Joseph at the language of Simeon. Here we seem almost certain that he is relating the very words of that Blessed Mother, especially as he puts St. Joseph before her, and calls him our Lord's "father." After what has been said of the very deep intelligence communicated to our Blessed Lady and to St. Joseph concerning the mysteries of the Incarnation, it may seem almost a matter of surprise that they should have "marvelled" at the language of this blessed Prophet. It is certain, from the *Magnificat*, and from the revelations made

both to our Blessed Lady and St. Joseph, that they could not have been ignorant of the truths of which Simeon spoke. It may have been new to them, to hear that God had made to him the personal promise which was now fulfilled. But it is not necessary thus to understand the words before us. The great truths and mysteries of the faith are the subject of continual wonder to the saints and angels in Heaven, as well as to the servants of God who know them on earth by faith. They never pall on the intelligence, their knowledge is never worn out, it is an ever-growing light, revealing day after day more and more the glory, the wisdom, the holiness, the mercy of God. The truths of which we speak would not be what they are, if they could ever be so fully penetrated as to leave no new depths to be discovered, nor would that comprehension of them which is vouchsafed to the saints and angels be what it is, if it did not for ever excite and stimulate to fresh penetration and fresh wonder and thanksgiving the intelligence which it illuminates with an ever increasing clearness.

The words which are here recorded by the Evangelist are not meant to make us suppose that our Blessed Lady and St. Joseph had never heard of these things before. Now, as they found themselves for the first time in the Temple, at that simple but solemn ceremony, witnessing the enthusiasm and joy of the holy old man, and hearing his words which summed up so many famous passages of the Prophets, the grandeur and beauties and mercies of the great counsel of God came home to them with a fresh and peculiar force. Thus we find in the lives

of the saints, that at moments of special favour with God, in exalted states of prayer, or after Holy Communion, they often seem to penetrate in a way altogether new the mysteries of which, even before, they have had a quite supernatural intelligence, and their hearts are filled with a new joy, a fresh awe, a more intense devotion. So it may have been with our Blessed Lady and St. Joseph on this great occasion. And it may have been in the counsels of God that so it should be, since they were immediately to hear a still higher revelation concerning the reception of the promised salvation on the part of those to whom it was to be offered. They were to hear prophetic words, which implied all the sorrows of Calvary. The first part of this interview with Simeon was to be to them what the Transfiguration was to be to the three chosen Apostles, who were afterwards to be the chosen witnesses also of the Agony in Gethsemani.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PROPHECY OF SIMEON.

St. Luke ii. 34, 35; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 11.

EVERY step in the history with which we are concerned was deliberately arranged by the Providence of God for certain great ends of His own in the unfolding of His mysteries and the execution of His counsels. The Purification of our Lady and the Presentation of our Lord in the Temple were incidents which seemed to have come about naturally. The Law prescribed them, and fixed the time for them. We have already seen how they were made by God to coincide with His design of the fulfilment of the promise which had been made to the holy Simeon. Thus, at the same moment, our Lord was singularly honoured in His self-humiliation by the witness of a great servant of God, whose rank and reputation must have given great authority to that witness, and Simeon himself was blessed by the sight of the salvation which had so long been the subject of his prayers. God, as is usual with Him, had gone beyond what He had promised. He had brought His servant into the presence of the Saviour, as it seems, some considerable time before his own death, and He had allowed

him the privilege, hitherto reserved, perhaps, to Mary and Joseph, of carrying the precious Child in his own arms. What special spiritual graces may have been vouchsafed to this holy man at this time we are only left to infer from what immediately followed, in his being made the organ of a great prophecy relating to the Blessed Child and His Mother. But we cannot doubt that graces and spiritual gifts were bestowed upon him in large profusion, as he held our Lord in his arms and clasped Him to his heart. It might have seemed that the purpose of God in this mystery was now accomplished, and that Simeon might return in thankfulness and joy to meditate over the blessing which had been bestowed upon him, to cherish for the rest of his life, whether it was long or short after this time, the remembrance of the sweetness and Divine majesty of the Babe Whom he had caressed, and the gracious dignity and heavenly modesty of His Mother.

But the Providence of God had other and further designs, which were to be served in this mystery of our Lord's first visit to the Temple after His birth. It was not only that the Law was to be accomplished, ratified, and consecrated by the Personal contact of our Lord. It was not only that He was to be honoured in the holiest place on earth, by a chosen servant of God. It was not only that the Divine promise made to Simeon was then to be abundantly fulfilled. It was not only that the hearts of Mary and Joseph were filled with consolation, both at the holy rite itself which had been performed, and at the honour

which the Providence of God had arranged that His Son should receive in the Temple. Another great advance in the unfolding of the Divine Counsels was now to take place. Simeon had been brought thither to meet our Lady and the Child so unexpectedly, in order that he might be the instrument of a very solemn announcement to her, which was to colour deeply all the joy of what seemed an occasion so simply and singly joyful, and to leave in her heart and mind, so fond of pondering over the methods and decrees of Providence, a sorrow and a pang which was to last all her life.

We may perhaps see some of the Divine reasons which may have caused this revelation to be made at this particular time, without going far beyond what has already come before us in the narrative. In the first place, it has already been noted that this first coming of our Lord to the Temple had been made a subject of prophecy, and that the prophecy had especially insisted on the severe and searching effect of His Presence there. "The Lord Whom you seek, and the Angel of the Tabernacle Whom you desire, shall come to His Temple. Behold, He cometh, saith the Lord of Hosts, and who shall be able to think of the day of His coming, and who shall stand to see Him? for He is like a refining fire, and like the fuller's herb."[1] It is not unlikely that this prophecy may have been in the mind of holy Simeon himself, and that the Divine inspiration which moved him to utter his own prophecy may have laid hold of the

[1] Mal. iii. 1, 2.

thought in his own mind, and have grounded upon it the prediction which it was his office now to deliver.

The thought which would be naturally suggested by the words of Malachias would be that of the keen piercing severity with which any new revelation of God, in His ineffable holiness and purity, must of necessity fall upon men in general, even upon the priests at the altar, of whom the older prophet speaks more particularly. It is this principle which is expressed in the language of St. John Baptist afterwards about our Lord, Whom he describes as having His fan in His hand, and as thoroughly cleansing His floor, gathering the wheat into His garner, and burning the chaff with unquenchable fire.[2] This thought is expressed also in other passages of Scripture, in our Lord's own words, and those of the Apostles, and it is, in truth, witnessed to by all experience in the Church. This searching influence results in the division of men into two classes, according to the state of their hearts, and it is this division, practically, which is here predicted, together with its invariable and inevitable accompaniment of opposition, contradiction, and persecution for the Word of God and those to whom it is committed. Thus we may see that the simple presence of our Lord in the Temple, which was a fulfilment of prophecy, may naturally have suggested a further development of the prophecy, such as we have now before us in the words of holy Simeon.

We may draw out this thought a little more fully presently. It may have belonged to the prophetical

2 St. Matt. iii. 12.

picture, as it had been already sketched by Malachias, and may therefore have had its place naturally in the message which the Blessed Simeon was now commissioned to deliver. There may also be similar Divine reasons for that part of the same message which contains the prediction of the compassion of our Blessed Lady, together with that of the Passion of her Son. It has been said that one of the privileges connected with her Divine Maternity is that which is called, by some of the saints, the communication to her of the Passion of our Lord. Something has been said concerning this privilege in a former part of this work. It is a distinct confirmation of the teaching of the Saints concerning our Blessed Lady that we find these words concerning her compassion inserted in this prophecy of Simeon. A great part of this privilege must be considered to have consisted in her being raised so early in the history to a knowledge of the future reception of our Lord by mankind, and thus taught to meditate on the coming Passion from the very beginning even of the Infancy of our Lord. It made her heart like His own in this most important respect.

We may suppose that there were many features in the life of her Blessed Son which came upon Mary without any prevision on her part. It was not necessary that she should always have that prevision, and it might even have marred the glory which she gave to God, by her immediate spontaneous surrender of her will in many a sudden emergency and trial, if she had always known beforehand what might be in the immediate future.

But with regard to this prevision of the Sacred Passion, it was the will of God that she should be warned from this very early date in the history, and we can at least imagine, without temerity, more than one holy reason why this was fitting in the counsels of God. For there is no season so fruitful in opportunities of merit as the season which is most fruitful in occasions of suffering. Such a time enables the soul to make the most heroic sacrifices of its own choices and desires, to resign itself most perfectly to the Divine Will, to accept with loving readiness even the most painful anticipations, for those anticipations are the most painful which represent to loving souls the crosses which are decreed for those whom they love the most. It may have been for the sake of the continual opportunity of increasing most rapidly in merit that our Lady was thus made acquainted with the coming sufferings of our Lord.

And again our Lady, like our Lord Himself, may have given God the greatest possible glory by her sufferings in anticipation of the Passion. And again, it may have been fitting that our Lord should thus have in His Mother a companion in His own constant thoughts concerning the Passion, which we understand to have been in His Heart from the very first and continually. She would thus minister to Him perpetual consolation, as well as rise ever higher and higher in merit and grace by the conformity of her will with His own and that of God. This would also be a fitting preparation and foundation, in her, for that other great privilege from which we all derive so much daily benefit, the

tender motherly relation in which we all are placed towards her. For it is a mother's part to sorrow and suffer pain for each one of her children, who are dearer to her because they have cost her so much. The revelation to her of this future treatment of our Lord at the hands of men, a treatment morally inevitable under the circumstances, considering Who He was and what He came to do, what He was to claim from mankind by His most pure teaching and holiness of example, could not have been made to our Blessed Lady without a Divine purpose of glory to God, honour to our Lord, exaltation to her, and benefits to us. Among the blessings which she received at this glorious time, there may have been none more rich in grace, and so more precious to her soul, none also more fruitful to us in increasing her love for us and her power to help us, than this prevision of the Passion.

"And Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His Mother, Behold, this Child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted, and thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed." There are here four things which are distinctly prophesied. The first is that the Holy Child is set by God for the fall of many in Israel. The second is that He is also set for the resurrection of many. The third is that He is to be a sign that is to be contradicted, and the fourth is that a sword shall pierce the soul of the Blessed Mother herself. Finally, the prophecy gives the Divine reason for all this Providential arrangement, that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed.

The declaration, in the first place, that our Lord is set by God for the purpose of these results, means that this is not to come about by accident, but that God had determined to send our Lord as the Light to illuminate the Gentiles, and to be the glory of Israel, with the full foreknowledge that these results would come about. The two issues went together in the Divine knowledge, though they were not decreed by God in the same way. For He decreed the one in the exercise of His mercy and faithfulness, and He determined in His patience and justice to permit the other. The glories of which Simeon had spoken in his canticle were the fruits of the mercy and power of God, the issues of which he now speaks to Mary were to be the result of the workings of human choice and free will under the dispensation of God's Providence, in which He does not force human liberty to accept His favours and mercies. The first issue which was thus contemplated in the counsels of God, and foretold by His Prophet, was that the Holy Child was to be set, as a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence, for the fall of many in Israel. That is, many in Israel were to take scandal at Him, and fall, to their own eternal loss. The advent of our Lord in the Flesh, more especially in all the conditions and circumstances of humiliation, poverty, and the like, which He chose for Himself, gave an occasion for the fall of all those whose hearts were indisposed to receive Him. They were, as it were, standing when He appeared, for they were living in the faith of the coming Messias, and this, as has been said, was sufficient as a condition of salvation, just as afterwards

Christian faith became that condition in the Providence of God.

Our Lord said afterwards of the Jews, with a meaning something like this, that if He had not come to them they would not have had sin. They might have been saved by their faith in Him before He came, if their lives had corresponded to their faith, and if they had used the means which they possessed for reconciliation with God after sin. But they were forced, by the presence of our Lord, to take part either with Him or against Him. Their faith in the Messias to come was now to be enlarged into faith in the Messias present among them, as Christian faith is faith in the Messias Who has come. Here was an occasion on which, as holy Simeon says at the close of his prophecy, a manifestation of thoughts should be made out of many hearts. The Person and character of our Lord, the manner in which He presented Himself, the evidences of His Mission, the whole Kingdom of the Incarnation as fashioned by Him—would they accept these, or would they reject these? This depended on the state of their hearts. And in the case of many in Israel, the state of their hearts was such as to make them turn away from Him, and so fall. They lost the faith they had, they did not close with the offer and the designs of God.

The second member of the prophecy relates to the other kind of issue which followed on the presentation of our Lord to the people as their Messias. If some turned away and rejected Him, others believed in Him. The faith which they had before had in the Messias to come, became faith in Him as

the present Messias. The state of their hearts enabled them to find no stumbling-block in His humiliation, as afterwards others believed in Him, notwithstanding the offence of the Cross. These rose again, because their sins were forgiven them by virtue of their faith, and they rose to the far higher privilege of the Christian covenant. "As many as received Him," as St. John tells us in the exordium of his Gospel, "to them He gave power to become the sons of God." He imparted to them that marvellous favour which made them by adoption and grace, what He was by nature, the sons of God. This was a rising to a new life, a higher existence, a supernatural citizenship. It is what St. Peter speaks of as a partaking of the Divine Nature. This immense privilege was the free gift and work of God. Those who fell, fell through their own fault. Those who rose again, did so by the gift of God. And in each case we see the working of the condition with which the prophecy concludes—"that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed."

The language of the prophecy does not forbid the interpretation by which both these alternative effects of our Lord's presence among men may have been successively carried out in the same persons. That is, it may have been possible for some men to fall first and rise afterwards, as for others to rise first and to fall afterwards. The effect of any near approach of what is Divine and holy is always a severe trial to the human heart. St. Paul tells us that the "Word of God is living and effectual, and more piercing than any two-edged sword, and reaching unto the division of the soul and spirit and of

the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart."[3] So no doubt, beyond all other instances of the preaching of the Word of God must it have been when it was preached by our Lord's own mouth. It could not but divide men against themselves, so to say, troubling them deeply by rousing up the conflict, always possible in every soul, between the good elements and the bad, a conflict that could never be ended by peace until the will surrenders itself entirely to the influences of grace. The Word of God would work in the same way still more obviously, setting man against man by the division which it created between those who closed with the Divine offers and those who rejected them.

But in our present state of probation the war between these two influences is never quite finally settled as long as life lasts, and thus, in the prevision and prediction of the effects of our Lord's presence in the world, must be included the possibility of the alternatives of success and defeat in the same soul of the good or the bad element. There were to be some, as we know too well, who were to welcome our Lord and His teaching for a time, and then to fall away. There were to be some, who were to be His disciples and near friends, and then were to turn against Him. One of His own dear Apostles was to be the traitor. On the other hand, there were to be some who hung back for a time and afterwards gained courage enough to confess Him manfully, as was the case, as we know, with Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea, and Gamaliel, the son of

3 Heb. iv. 12.

this very Simeon, if so he was. And some were to give Him a still greater triumph, as St. Paul, who from an enemy and a persecutor became, as the Apostle of the Gentiles, the colleague of St. Peter himself. The strong keen light of the presence of our Lord was to pierce to the hearts of all, and to have every possible variety of effect upon them, subduing them or revolting them according to their own dispositions. So it has been ever since. Such was the effect of the preaching of the Apostles, such has been the effect of the preaching of the Church ever since the Apostles. St. Paul speaks of it as a triumph of the Gospel, even when men are made worse by the knowledge which they will not follow. "Thanks be to God, Who always maketh us to triumph in Jesus Christ, and manifesteth the odour of His knowledge by us in every place. For we are the good odour of Christ unto God, in them that are saved and in them that perish. To the one indeed the odour of death unto death, but to the others the odour of life unto life."[4]

The next portion of the prophecy goes beyond the two first. It might have been the Providence of God that men should either reject or accept our Lord, and, in consequence, either fall or rise, and that then there might have been an end, as it were, of their probation. It might have left them fallen or risen, and nothing further might have followed, except the consequences to themselves. But it was not so to be. Our Lord in His Person, His Character, His Teaching, His Church, was to gather to Himself a storm of perpetual and inextinguishable

[4] 2 Cor. ii. 15, 16.

contradiction and persecution. He was to raise a standard in the world, He was to call His soldiers to war, and He was to challenge the unsparing and relentless enmity of all those who would not join His banner.

This third part of the prophecy of Simeon, therefore, gives a new character to the whole Kingdom which our Lord was to found. He was to be a sign that should be contradicted. It was to be so in His own lifetime, and it is of this that the blessed Simeon seems chiefly to speak. His Person was maligned, He was said to break the Sabbath, to be in league with Satan, to have a devil. His teaching was maligned as seditious, rebellious, contrary to the Law, and hostile to civil peace. And so from the very first it has been, so to the very last it is to be, with His Church. It is so to be, it has so been, by no accident, by no cause that can pass away or change. He said it at the very outset of His teaching, to Nicodemus: "The light is come into the world, and men love darkness rather than the light, for their works were evil. For every one that doth evil, hateth the light, and cometh not to the light, that his works may not be reproved."[5] He said again at the close of His teaching, to His disciples in the upper chamber: "If the world hate you, know ye that it hath hated Me before you. If you had been of the world, the world would love its own, but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said to you, The servant is not greater than his master. If they

5 St. John iii. 19, 20.

have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they have kept My word, they will keep yours also."[6] The world is not a power that can hate and not vent its hatred in action. The whole prevision of the Cross of our Lord and of the perpetual crucifixion of the Church is contained in these few gentle words of blessed Simeon: "A sign that shall be contradicted."

Moreover, it is very remarkable that, short as this prophecy is, it is not yet so short as not to contain, as one of its distinct elements, the prediction of the Compassion of our Blessed Lady as well as that of the Passion of our Lord. "And thy own soul a sword shall pierce." The sorrows of Mary are therefore a distinct subject of prophecy, as if the whole counsel of God could not be summed up, however concisely, without some mention of these. And it may also be said, that the prediction of the sufferings of our Lady is more precise and more forcibly descriptive than that of the Passion itself. For St. Simeon says of Him that He is to be a sign that shall be contradicted of, but of her he says that a sword shall pierce her soul. But the piercing of the soul is something more bitter and terrible in its anguish than simple contradiction. Again, it is remarkable that the words of this prophecy describe most accurately that kind of martyrdom which was to be the lot of our Blessed Lady. It is not the actual death of the body, as our Lord was to be put to death upon the Cross. It is the interior crucifixion of the soul and heart, a crucifixion which was not limited to one moment or to the space of a few

[6] St. John xv. 18—20.

hours, any more than the "contradiction" to which our Blessed Lord was to be exposed. Mary would suffer most intensely in heart, as the sufferings of our Lord were more intense at any particular time, and especially at the time of the Passion. But the sword would pierce her soul from the very beginning. Indeed, as many as were the contradictions of various kinds which our Lord was to suffer, so many were to be the swords which should pierce the soul of His Mother.

It has already been said that the last clause of the prophecy is not to be confined, in its application, to the single sentence to which it is directly appended, as if the blessed Simeon had said that our Lady's soul should be pierced, that out of many hearts thoughts might be revealed. This may be considered either as the purpose, or as the result, of the Providential arrangements concerning our Lord, which are the subject of prophecy here. That is, it may be meant that God arranged the whole economy of the Incarnation, in the manner in which it was actually carried out, in order that out of the hearts of men their thoughts might reveal themselves, and so be tested and tried by His all-seeing justice. The dispensation of the Incarnation is the trial of the world. If it be true that the angels who fell, fell because they would not reverence their God in a nature inferior to their own, when it was revealed to them that He was to become Man, then the dispensation of the Incarnation was the trial of angels also, as well as of men. Or it may be meant that this great work of God was to have as its consequence the revelation of the thoughts of all. And

it is certainly not difficult to see that, if our Lord had come, as the Jews expected Him to come, in power and greatness, wealth and honour, a conquering King before Whom all enemies trembled, to Whom the whole world could not but submit, and Who would reward His friends and followers with all that earth possesses of glory, honour, and prosperity, there would have been no occasion at all for the revelation of the thoughts of men concerning Him. All would have at once conformed to Him, whether for good motives or for bad.

But, in either way, these sufferings of the Blessed Mother are the test of men's thoughts, as well as the contradictions which have met her Son in His work of mercy and sacrifice. A large number, even of those who call themselves by His name, have shown that if they acknowledge Him at all, it is unwillingly and unintelligently, and that they are either determined to cut down the honour they pay to Him so as to refuse to honour her for His sake, or so blind and hard of heart as not to see how He must love her and desire her to be honoured, how close she is to Him, how intense have been her sufferings on His account, how large a share she must have had in His work, as far as it can be shared, and how inconceivably great must be her position in His Kingdom. The true Catholic heart understands the connection between her sorrows and her greatness. It is a greatness won by suffering, the appointed means by which all crowns are won. The homage we pay to the Mother of God as our mother is founded, by His own appointment, on her share in the Passion, as is proved by His

words to her and St. John when they stood under the Cross. In this way, the last words of holy Simeon may be understood of the sorrows of Mary as well as of the "contradictions" of her Son.

Some of the saints tell us, that before the blessed Simeon uttered these words of mournful prophecy to the Blessed Mother of God, all that had passed at the mystery of the Purification in the Temple had been full of brightness and of joy. It could indeed hardly be otherwise, for what could be more joyous than the first Presentation of our Lord in the House of His Father? What could be more joyous than for that Blessed Virgin Mother to discharge the obligation of the law, which she so much loved, in that holy place where she had once lived, as in the sanctuary itself? She had no need indeed for the purifying rites of that law, but that would only make it a greater consolation to her to discharge them, to exercise humility after the example of our Lord Himself, to hide her greatness and her glory in the holy offering and the sacred ceremonies which accompanied it, and to express her intense and boundless thankfulness for the mercies of God to her. It was a joy to see the work of redemption so far advanced, to see the Redeemer Himself undertaking the work solemnly, by His oblation of Himself to His Father, and then that joy which was in the hearts of that Blessed Lady and St. Joseph was, as it were, doubled and trebled by the sudden coming in of the holy man Simeon, and by the wonderful words in which he gave thanks to God for the blessing of being allowed to see that Holy Child. It is always a joy to holy souls to communicate one with

the other their feelings of thankfulness, and to speak together of the mighty mercies and goodness of God. And so it might have seemed that this mystery of the Purification was to pass away in the same unbroken joyousness as that of the Visitation, as if the Canticle of Simeon had taken up the echoes of the *Magnificat*, and as if the blessed company of saints might part in peace, full of thankfulness and holy joys.

But as the saints tell us, our Lady saw a sudden cloud overspread the face of that venerable man, who had held our Lord in his arms. She saw his colour fade, his cheek grow pale, his steps totter, he seemed to be struck with a sudden blow as of death. For then God revealed to him the future of that Blessed Child, all the contradiction and persecution and opposition, the warfare against Him of slander and calumny, of treachery and conspiracy, His bitter enemies and His false friends, the black ingratitude and perfidy, and at last the issue of all in the Cross planted on Calvary. All this that blessed old man saw, and his soul was pierced through and through with the sorrow of the prevision of the Cross. And then, in obedience to the inspiration of God, he gave forth the prophecy, sad and terrible enough to change all the joy of the Purification into the deepest woe, how the Child was set for the fall and rising again of many, and for a sign of contradiction, and then he had to add, "Yea, and thine own soul a sword shall pierce." And so the mystery which began in joy came to its close in sorrow, the brightness of their approach to the Temple of God was changed into a most mournful departure, and a cloud

settled on the Heart of that Blessed Mother, which never left it from that day, "and thine own soul a sword shall pierce!"

We need not doubt that this contemplation is founded on the truth. For it is nothing wonderful that a prophet like this holy Simeon should have suddenly revealed to him the certainty of so great a feature in the history of our Lord as this of the Cross, without having known it before. The prophets, as St. Paul tells us, know in part, and prophesy in part. That is, they know what is revealed to them of the counsel of God, for some particular purpose, but they do not know the whole counsel of God. And so this blessed soul may have known the Child in his arms to be the Redeemer of Israel, and yet he may not have had a revelation, before that moment, of the mystery of the Cross. For our Blessed Lady it may not have been so, for her intelligence of the prophecies was far greater and deeper than that of any of the saints of God. It is not probable that the meaning of so many of the Psalms which speak of the Passion, or of some of the prophecies of Isaias and Jeremias, could have been hidden from her. She must have known that the Redeemer of the world was to redeem the world by suffering. But yet this revelation now made to her by the mouth of holy Simeon may have struck on her heart as new. For she may have known it before as a conclusion of her own mind, formed from a consideration of what God had predicted. She was now to know it by means of a special declaration from God by the mouth of the prophet,

accompanied by a wonderful illumination of her mind as to the future mystery.

There are many things which we expect and think likely or certain, but it is a new thing when we are told at last that so it must be. We know how we often think it likely that our sick friends are to die, when they are laid on the bed of sickness, and day after day passes without recovery, and with constant waning of vital force, yet it is a new revelation to us when the priest of God or the physician leans over and tells us that there is no hope. So it must have been with that most tender Heart of the Virgin Mother. She had now for some six weeks possessed her new-born treasure, after having worshipped Him present in her womb for nine months before He was born. And now, in the very moment, so to say, of her triumph, when the Temple of God had received Him, and the saints and the priest of God had come, as it were, to welcome Him, in the name of His Father, these few words sound in our ears, and she is at once crowned the Mother of Dolours. Now there is no longer any uncertainty. Now God had spoken by the priest and the prophet, who has proved his mission by recognizing the Holy Child when no others recognized Him. Now for the first time she is raised to that pre-eminent throne of suffering. Henceforth she is the *Mater Dolorosa*. It was a change almost as great as that which came over her after the Incarnation, when in a moment she had become the Mother of God. Well, indeed, may she have kept these things in her heart. From that day to the end of her life the sword was working there.

Again, it is very remarkable that, although this holy Prophet is said to have blessed both our Lady and St. Joseph, he is not said to have addressed any word to the latter about his future sufferings, as he did to Mary. It is very true indeed, that, high as was the position of St. Joseph, as Head of the Holy Family, it was not so high, in the eyes of God, as that of our Blessed Lady. Moreover, St. Joseph might appear, in the eyes of men, at the Presentation in the Temple, as at the Nativity, the Circumcision, the Epiphany, and all through the Sacred Infancy, as the natural father of the Holy Child. But to an eye enlightened as to the secrets of God, such as that of this Prophet, he would appear, as he was, and the language of St. Simeon may be understood as showing that he understood perfectly well the secret of the Virginal Conception and Childbearing. But, in truth, there is no need for considerations of this kind to explain the omission, in this prophecy, of any word which has special relation to St. Joseph. That blessed Prophet would not see, in any vision that might be vouchsafed to him, the anguish of Joseph by the side of that of Mary. The Providence of God had ordained that the life of St. Joseph should cease when his office had been discharged, and that he was not to witness that manifestation of our Lord to the people which took place when the Public Life began.

Our Lady indeed, and St. Joseph also, had much interior suffering on our Lord's account, even before His preaching began. Within no long time from this bright and beautiful day of the Purification was to follow the Epiphany. The holy Kings were

already on their way from the East, and they would knock, as it were, ere long, at the doors of the unconscious city of Jerusalem, which had now received the promised visit of her Lord to His Temple, and had not known Him. On the Epiphany would follow the Flight, the Massacre of the Children, the exile in Egypt. These were swords to the heart of Mary, and they must have pierced deeply also the heart of Joseph. So, too, he was to share with her the mysterious sorrow of the Losing of our Lord in the Temple. But he was to be called away to the other world before the great time of the contradictions began. Thus the omission of all reference to him, in the prophecy of Simeon, is a proof that the holy Prophet was divinely guided alike in what he did say and what he did not say. It is not impossible that this omission may have been noticed, both by St. Joseph and by our Blessed Lady. They may perhaps have understood it as implying that they were to be separated before the time came of which the Prophet spoke. Or this may have been one of those things on which they pondered and meditated devoutly, without, as yet, any distinct intelligence of their meaning.

We have already said something about the designs of God in making this announcement to our Blessed Lady at this early stage of the life of our Lord. The glory of God may have been greatly increased thereby, on account of the beautiful virtues which this knowledge of the future would call forth in the soul of the Blessed Mother. It must have been greatly for the consolation of the Sacred Heart that she should be from the very beginning, the

companion of Its secret thoughts. It must have given Mary immense opportunities of merit, and have been the foundation of more than one of her singular privileges, and in this also it must have secured immense advantages to us by the increase, both of her love for those for whom her Son was to suffer, and of her power to help us in the participation of the fruits of His sufferings. Further, the knowledge that she was all her life from this moment the Mother of Sorrows cannot but soften still more our hearts towards her, and add to the love and devotion which we already bear her, to our confidence in her tender care for us, and our desire to love her Son as she desires Him to be loved. Thus this unexpected prophecy of the blessed Simeon was the most important of all the incidents of this glorious day. There was nothing to prepare for it, it was not necessary for the fulfilment of the promise which had been made to Simeon, it was not required as a part of the solemn recognition and honour which were, in a certain sense, due to our Lord on His first appearance in the Temple. The Purification and Presentation are complete without it. It seems a sort of fortuitous addition to the mystery of the Purification. And yet it may have been the very design of God that Simeon should then meet our Lady, for the express purpose of delivering this message. Certainly it must have produced a greater change in the thoughts and anticipations of the Holy Mother than any other incident of the day.

It must not be supposed that our Blessed Lady was overwhelmed with grief in any merely human way at this announcement to her on the part of

God concerning her future sufferings. In her, by the special grace of God, the utmost tenderness of affection, the keenest possible perception of pain on account of the treatment of her Son, of the malice of the world, of the misery of the human souls who were to cost Him so much grief, and of all that there was to be in the whole history that could cause anguish to her motherly heart for the sake of our Lord and those whom He loved at such a price, were combined with the most perfect union to the will of God, the most enlightened discernment of the wonderful beauty and wisdom of all His decrees, the most absolute confidence in His power and intention to reward abundantly and superabundantly whatever was suffered for His sake, and a most ardent desire to bear her part to the utmost in sharing the Cross of her Son as far as it was possible for her to share it. Mary's life had been far more a life of Heaven than of earth. She measured all things by the measure of Heaven and of eternity. And she was, moreover, as has been said, wonderfully enlightened as to the meaning of the prophecies, and the words of Simeon would give to them many new meanings on which her mind and heart would feed.

But she would not the less feel most intensely the sorrow which was thus announced to her as her portion for the rest of her life. It was more than a martyrdom to which she was now sentenced. The pains of the body are as nothing to the pangs of the soul, and these are more keen and piercing in proportion to the perfection of the soul in itself, to its estimation of and love for our Lord when His

sufferings are the subject of the anguish which is felt. On all these accounts it is no exaggeration to say that the martyrdom of our Blessed Lady was more severe than that of any of those who are commonly honoured as martyrs in the Church. It is also true that, humanly speaking, she had little to prepare her for this great blow at this time. For since the Incarnation she had had trials indeed, but still her life had been a succession of most transporting joys, and she had lived among those who understood our Lord's dignity, and honoured Him with the most devout reverence. Notwithstanding all this, the grace and fortitude of our Lady's soul were so great, that although this announcement had so much of unexpectedness about it, and was in itself so severe, still it did not disturb the tranquil serenity of that Blessed Mother, nor task too strongly either her obedience or her resignation. She offered herself to the accomplishment of the will of God in her Son and in herself, with the most heroic resignation and the most perfect submission.

At the same time we cannot doubt that this was another occasion for a great advance in the graces communicated to her soul. The announcement of Simeon was in itself a demand on her courage and fidelity which had never been equalled in its own kind, and it implied the duty of a constant correspondence on her part to the requirements of the highest perfection throughout the long years which were to follow. God could not make so large a demand on the fidelity of His handmaid without, at the same time, giving her all the strength of soul which that demand implied, and her faithfulness

under the blow must have won her ever more and more fresh increases of grace. A new field for the exercise of the highest virtue was now thrown open to her, and her perfect companionship with the Heart of her Son, and all His sufferings and aspirations, was secured at the cost of a continual interior cross resembling as closely as possible His own. If God had not designed to crown her so magnificently as the Mother of Sorrows, we may venture to think this would not have been so. The dignity and power which were to be founded on so extraordinary an amount of suffering must indeed be great. The words of Simeon mark the first intimation in the Gospel History of the supreme state and power of Mary in the Kingdom of her Son, because they associate her so very closely to the sufferings on which that Kingdom is founded.

"And there was a prophetess called Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser. She was far advanced in years, and had lived with her husband seven years from her virginity. And she was a widow until fourscore and four years, who departed not from the Temple, by fasting and prayers serving night and day. Now she at the same hour coming in, gave praise to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all that looked for the redemption of Israel." Thus, as some of the Fathers tell us, no class, age, or sex was to be left out in the homage which was to be paid to our Lord in His Infancy. This holy woman had the same instinct of the value and beauty of continence as the famous heroine Judith. Both had lost their husbands, while they were themselves yet in the full bloom of youth and beauty, but they

could not be persuaded to marry a second time. This was about the highest witness that, in those times, could be borne to the principle of continence, as our Lady is said to have been the first to discern the beauty of virginity consecrated to God. These holy women were both highly honoured for their continence, and in the case of each the respect paid to her was enhanced by the evident sanctity of her life. Judith led the life of an ascetic in her own house at Bethulia. Anna, living in Jerusalem, gave herself entirely to the worship of God in the Temple, so much so that the Evangelist could say of her that she departed not from the Temple, by fastings and prayers serving, or worshipping, night and day. She was now eighty-four years of age, for so it seems best to understand the words of St. Luke. He tells us that she departed not from the Temple. That is, she spent in it all the time that she was allowed to spend in it. She lived, perhaps, in some part of the buildings attached to the Temple, so as to have access to it even at times when it was closed to others, and her time was divided between prayer and other exercises of an ascetic life.

This holy lady represents to us a whole class of women who are always to be found in the Church, as they were found in the Jewish system which preceded hers. The Providence of God either sets or keeps them free from worldly ties, and, without calling them to the cloister, directs them to live a life of piety and edification in the world, though they have little enough to do with the world in the ordinary sense. They devote themselves, according to their

character or opportunities, to active good works, or more particularly to the frequentation of the holy services, the worship of God, the celebration of His feasts, and the like. Anna seems to have been given up rather to the life of prayer and contemplation, accompanied with great mortifications, than to active works for the benefit of her neighbour. It may be that St. Luke is led to mention this chief feature in her life by the occasion on which she appears in the Gospel history, and that he might have had much to tell of her works of charity, if such had been his purpose. The class of such persons is mentioned now and then in some of the later Psalms, under the name of those "who fear the Lord"—that is, who spend a large part of their time in His worship.

At any period of history there would naturally be a little society of such persons around the Temple, and, at the time of our Lord's appearance, the great subject of thought and interest among them would be the approaching accomplishment of the promises of which the holy nation was the heir. They would be led by a holy instinct to make it the subject of their constant prayers and mortifications, understanding that it was the will of God that the coming fulfilment of His mercies was to be hastened on by the earnest prayers of His people. They would remember the example of the great Prophet Daniel, who when he understood by his studies of Jeremias that the appointed time of the seventy years of the desolation of Jerusalem was accomplished, set his face, as he says, "to the Lord my God to pray and make supplication with fasting and sackcloth

and ashes."[7] The prayer which is found in the passage of the Prophet just quoted might well serve as a model for those to be used by the devout among the Jews on the still greater occasion of the Coming of the Messias. Thus there would be many persons who might be drawn by a special impulse of the Holy Ghost to lay aside all other occupations, and spend their whole time, as far as possible, in prayer for the great end of the accomplishment of the prophecies.

It is natural that we should find that the mercy of God vouchsafed to choose a member of this holy class of His servants to be the recipient, along with Simeon, of the great joy of seeing our Lord on this His first visit to His Temple. A holy habit may be taken up and persevered in for a long time, and yet it may not appear what is the special favour which God has reserved for its crown and reward. And then at last there comes a great and unexpected blessing, which is enough, and more than enough, to have made it worth the while, apart from the spiritual and moral blessings which any holy habit long persevered in must bring with it. The faithfulness of these long years of service in the Temple in the case of holy Anna, was amply recompensed by the few moments during which she was allowed to find herself actually in the presence of our Lord and His Mother. His presence in the Temple was but for a short time, yet this faithful soul was not allowed to miss, by any seeming accident, this passing visit of the Infant in the arms of Mary.

We are not told how it was that Anna recognized

7 Daniel ix. 6.

Him in His humble guise, and discerned that His Mother was what she was. But she is said to have been a prophetess, by which we must understand, at the very least, a person gifted with singular spiritual discernment, and she may have learnt in prayer the signs by which she was to know which was the Child for Whose advent she had been looking. Perhaps she may have witnessed the action and heard the words of holy Simeon, and if this was the case, she would need no more to enlighten her. It seems rather that we are meant to understand that her witness was in some way independent of his. "She at the same hour coming in confessed to the Lord," that is, she gave witness to the truth concerning the mercy of God in fulfilling His promise, and she praised Him and blessed His name with intense fervour. She did something more than this, for "she spoke of Him to all that looked on for the redemption of Israel." Thus the joy of this bright festival of the Presentation in the Temple was spread through a small and chosen class of devout souls, who probably knew little of the words of the prophecy of the Cross, with which it had been the commission of Simeon to pierce for the first time the heart of the Blessed Mother. Our Lord, we may well suppose, did not let this knowledge be imparted to these devout persons, without at the same time blessing them and highly enriching them with His grace.

This witness of Anna naturally closes the history of the first stage of the Infancy of our Lord, immediately after His Birth. As the Visitation is the natural complement of the Annunciation, so the

Purification and Presentation in the Temple are the natural sequel to the history of the Nativity. The Holy Child has been born, and circumcised, He has received His appointed Name, and the holy rite of Purification has been performed for His Blessed Mother, who has presented Him to His Father in the Temple, and paid the appointed tax for His redemption, according to the Law. His humble birth has nevertheless been honoured by some representatives of all who might be expected to do Him homage. The Angels have brought Him the adoration of the citizens of Heaven, the shepherds represent the holy people in general, Simeon comes forward as one of the priestly class, and now the class of devout and holy women is represented by Anna and those to whom she had made known Who the Blessed Child was. All had been fulfilled that was required, and now the Holy Family might retire with their treasure to the place which had hitherto been their home during the few months of their married life. Thus we find St. Luke summing up this stage of the history in words which, like so much in this part of his Gospel, seem to come straight from our Blessed Lady herself. "And after they had performed all things according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their city Nazareth."

We shall speak in the next chapter of the well-known difficulty which these words have always contained for those who have to put together the complete Gospel history out of the fragments which alone remain to us in the several works of the Evangelists. For the present it is enough to consider

for a moment the feelings with which Mary and Joseph would now return to their happy home, which seems to have been the birthplace of our Blessed Lady, and the habitual dwelling-place of her holy parents. They had left Nazareth at short notice, and even if they had already made up their minds to leave it, in order that the Holy Child might be brought up in even greater privacy than was possible where they were well known, and where our Lady had so many relations, it would be requisite for them to revisit it in order to arrange for their departure to another home. But it is not necessary to think that this was already in their minds.

When any of us go back, after a great change in our lives, to some spot with which we have been familiar under other circumstances, the very unchangeableness of the spot makes us feel how great is the alteration in ourselves. There are the familiar hills and trees, the homes, perhaps, of our childhood, the church in which we have worshipped. Nature is the same, the green fields and streams, our favourite haunts, spots connected with the dearest memories of joy or sorrow. But all appears changed, whereas the change is truly in ourselves. So it may have been with Mary, and with Joseph, though he perhaps had not lived long at Nazareth. The little city was very dear to them, but they must have felt almost strangers on returning to it, though their absence had not lasted many weeks. But the Maternity of Mary was now complete, and the Holy Childbearing at Bethlehem had added immensely to her dignity, her grace, her merit, and had marvel-

lously increased in her soul her intelligence of the character of the Kingdom of her Son. St. Joseph had had his first experience of the character of his own work and office, of the weary cross he was to carry for so many years, which were, nevertheless, years of the most tranquil and overwhelming happiness, and of great spiritual progress. They came back to Nazareth fresh from the lessons of Bethlehem, and with the words of holy Simeon deep in their hearts. The King had been recognized by His servants, though the world had turned away from Him, and was at no great length of time to rise against Him in fury. Above all, the Queen of Sorrows had received her crown. She had taken into her heart of hearts the sword which God had destined for her, as the choicest mark of His love, the means of her ever-increasing sanctification and growth in resemblance to her Son.

CHAPTER VIII.

NAZARETH AND BETHLEHEM.

St. Luke ii. 39; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 11.

THERE can be no doubt that if the same heavenly-guided hand had written for the Church of God both the first and the third Gospels, the writer would have told us sufficiently the relation, in point of time, between the mysteries of the Purification and of the Epiphany. But St. Matthew had his work to do, and St. Luke had his, and they would have been unlike any writers of the age in which they lived, if they had put themselves to the pains of precluding all possible mistakes or answering all possible questions concerning the chronological order and relations of the several events of which it was their commission to speak or not to speak. Nor, even if they had done this, and thereby encumbered their works, after the modern fashion, with a large number of notes, would they have satisfied the critical temper of modern times. Their works would, in the first place, be rejected as spurious, because they would have about them unmistakeable evidences of modern authorship. And, in the second place, their explanatory statements would be exposed to quite as much cavilling as their original narratives.

We have already said something towards the true explanation of the difficulty, which is only an apparent difficulty. When people once persuade themselves that the Evangelists had each his own purpose, and attended to it exclusively, with nothing more than a tacit and mental reference, in the case of the later writers, to the work of the earlier, and that they left the truth of what they said to be accepted on their authority, difficulties of the kind of which we speak will mainly vanish. We may repeat, then, that it was the purpose of the first Evangelist to accumulate, especially at the outset of his narrative, the evidences which showed the complete fulfilment of the prophecies in the case of our Lord. He was to be born of a Virgin, and thus St. Matthew places in the very front of his history the irresistible proof of this fulfilment, contained in the history of the hesitation of St. Joseph and the angelic vision by which that hesitation was set at rest. He thus adduces, in evidence of the fulfilment of prophecy in this respect, the witness of the one person in the world whose evidence was conclusive, confirmed by the special revelation made to him by the Angel.

St. Matthew's next point is to prove that our Lord was born at Bethlehem, in accordance with the prophecies, and for this purpose he places in the second place, the history of the Wise Kings, the Massacre of the Innocents, and the Flight into Egypt, in which also he points out a fulfilment of prophecy. He does not say how the Holy Family came to be at Bethlehem, nor does he tell us how long before the Epiphany our Lord had been born.

It was not his purpose to speak of the Shepherds at the Nativity, nor of the circumstances of the Nativity itself, nor of the Circumcision, nor of the Purification. All these things find their natural place in the historical Gospel of St. Luke. Neither of the two Evangelists refers to the other or links his own narrative with that of the other. What one omits, the other relates. What one relates, the other omits. It follows inevitably, that we have now and then to fill up by conjecture breaks in the continuous chain of events, where no connection is supplied us by the direct words of the Evangelists. In such cases we have one plain rule to follow, a rule commended alike by reason and by the respect we feel for the authorities whom we are following. This rule is, to take for granted all that they positively assert as having happened, to do no violence to their words, and to arrange all necessary links in the story in the most probable manner.

At the point which we have now reached in the history of the Holy Infancy, it becomes necessary to resort to this kind of arrangement. And we shall see that we are again led to recognize the decisive and authoritative action of St. Joseph in determining the fortunes, so to say, of the Holy Family. It was natural for him and his Blessed Spouse to remain in Bethlehem long enough to make it easy for them to present the Holy Child in the Temple, on the day of the Purification of His Mother. It is not likely that all the mothers in the Holy Land were able to go up to the Temple after their childbirth. That would have been a greater burthen on the people than we can probably imagine to have been insisted on. But

our Blessed Lady would desire to fulfil the Law perfectly, and the neighbourhood of Bethlehem to Jerusalem made it easy for the obligation to be discharged.

After the Purification, there could have been nothing to detain the Holy Family from the home which they had probably left at short notice, and we are accordingly told that when they had accomplished the prescriptions of the Law they returned into Galilee to their own town Nazareth. We should suppose that there they remained settled during the whole of the period of the Holy Infancy, but for the narrative of St. Matthew concerning the Epiphany. We learn from that narrative that when the Wise Kings arrived from the East, and asked where was the new-born King of the Jews, they were told, on the authority of the Sanhedrin, whom Herod consulted formally on that question, that the birth of the Messias had been clearly fixed by one of the prophets at Bethlehem. To Bethlehem they had gone, and there they had found the Child with His Mother Mary, there they had paid their homage and offered their gifts, and it was there that they were warned in a dream not to return to Herod, to give him the information which he had craftily hoped to derive from them. It was at Bethlehem, then, that the Child was found by the Wise Kings, it was from Bethlehem that St. Joseph took Him by night with His Mother into Egypt. And, as far as we can gather, it was to Bethlehem that the Holy Family would naturally have returned after the death of Herod, but for the alarm caused by the news of the succession of Archelaus to the throne of his father,

which made St. Joseph betake himself rather to Nazareth for the sake of greater safety. And yet we are not told how the Holy Family came to be at Bethlehem, so as to receive the visit of the Kings, if that event took place after the Purification, when they had returned to Nazareth.

It is enough here to say briefly, that it is most commonly thought by the best commentators on the subject, that we have in the presence of the Holy Family at Bethlehem at the Epiphany, coupled with their undoubted return to Nazareth after the Purification, an indication of a change of abode on the part of St. Joseph in the interval between these two mysteries. The Gospel narratives leave only two alternatives. One is to suppose that the Holy Kings visited Bethlehem a few days only after the Nativity of our Lord. This is in accordance with the custom of the Church to celebrate the Epiphany a few days after Christmas. Then also the Flight into Egypt, the massacre of the Innocents, the death of Herod, and the return from Egypt into Galilee, must have been before the time came for the Purification of our Blessed Lady and the Presentation of our Lord in the Temple on the fortieth day after His Birth. This theory teems with difficulties, for it seems hardly possible to crowd so many important events, including long journeys of the Holy Family, into so short a time. Moreover, in this hypothesis, we should have to suppose that St. Joseph, immediately after retiring to Nazareth for the sake of avoiding the danger which might be incurred by the residence of the Holy Family in the land of Judæa, went up at once to Jerusalem itself, with our Lady and the

Blessed Child, for the Purification, and thus braved the very danger which had made him seek a home away from Judæa. These things are not impossible, but they certainly seem improbable.

On the other hand, if we are inclined to ask, on what grounds it is thought necessary to fix the date of the Epiphany within the time before the Purification, the necessity seems only to arise from the fact that the feast of the Epiphany is kept by the Church at that time. But it is quite possible, that if the 6th of January be the exact anniversary of the Epiphany, the mystery may still have taken place a year after the Nativity, instead of within the first few days after it. The celebration of an anniversary does not fix the year of the occurrence which is thus commemorated. It only fixes the time of the year. Moreover, the Church tells us, in her Office for that feast, that she commemorates on that day no less than three great mysteries of the Life of our Lord. One is the Epiphany, the second is the Baptism of our Lord, and the third is the first miracle at Cana of Galilee. It is not easy to suppose that this last mentioned miracle took place a full year after our Lord's Baptism. But it most certainly could not have taken place on the same day. And we are thus led to see that we may make great mistakes, if we suppose that, in all cases, the days on which great mysteries are commemorated have anything of necessity to do with their chronological relation one to another.

The other alternative is to suppose that, after the Holy Family had returned, as St. Luke tells us they did return, to their home at Nazareth after the

mystery of the Purification, they shortly moved their residence, or their intended residence, from Nazareth to Bethlehem, probably wishing to settle there altogether, at least for the time, in the city of David, in the neighbourhood of Jerusalem, and also of the holy pair, Zachary and Elisabeth, and perhaps also of some members of St. Joseph's own family. As will be seen in the next chapter, it is not absolutely necessary to suppose that St. Joseph had fixed his residence in Bethlehem, intending to remain there permanently. All the requirements of the history would be satisfied, if he had taken our Blessed Lady and her Divine Child to Bethlehem before the time of the Epiphany, whether intending to remain there altogether or not. All that is necessary is that they should have been at Bethlehem at that time, and this might well have been the case, if only for a passing visit, as will be seen presently. This visit may have taken place within the space of a few weeks or months, and thus when the holy Kings came from the East, where they had seen the star of our Lord, probably at the time of His Birth, the Holy Family would have been residing in the "house" in which they were afterwards found by these blessed visitants, as St. Matthew tells us. It is clear, from the mention of the age selected by Herod for the limit of the massacre of the children, that he must have been told by the Wise Kings that the Child Whom they came to seek ought to be in His second year, and not beyond His second year. St. Matthew seems to have mentioned this circumstance for the express purpose of telling us that our Lord was about that age at the time of the Epiphany.

In this way all the dates which are suggested by the Gospel history as probable, fit in well one with the other, and we have the reason furnished us for the mention of the age of the children who were put to death. The remainder of the history flows on without any difficulty.

It can be said, on the other side, that if, as is thus supposed, St. Joseph and our Blessed Lady returned with their precious charge from Galilee after going home to Nazareth after the Purification, we have no intimation in the Gospel history that such was the case. It is perfectly true that this is nowhere distinctly said. It is, however, not altogether without foundation in the actual words of Scripture, for we are certainly told, by implication, that St. Joseph would have fixed his home in the "land of Judæa," after the return from Egypt, if it had not been for the fear of Archelaus. This is as much as to say, that St. Joseph considered the land of Judæa, that is, Bethlehem itself, as the proper or desirable residence for the Holy Family after the Birth of our Lord. He would not have returned from Egypt to Nazareth but for exceptional motives. It is therefore natural to think, if we have any reason for thinking it, that he had already moved from Nazareth to Bethlehem before the exceptional reasons for a residence elsewhere had arisen. But those reasons did not arise until after the Epiphany, the massacre of the Holy Innocents, and the return from Egypt. Thus, if we have good reason for thinking that the Epiphany took place at the distance of some weeks or months, at least, after the Nativity, and if we also find that the Epiphany took place at Bethlehem,

it is natural to think that, in the interval after the Purification the Holy Family had removed to the place of the Birth of our Lord as their usual residence.

If these arguments are considered, no difficulty remains except the apparent strangeness of the absence of any mention of the change on the part of the Evangelists. But it would be hard to say either why it should have been mentioned at all, or by which of the two Evangelists, who alone speak of the Holy Infancy, it should have been mentioned. For St. Matthew never mentions Nazareth at all, until he comes to give the reason which induced St. Joseph to settle there, after the return from Egypt. The mention of the removal, therefore, would be out of place in St. Matthew. And St. Luke never mentions Bethlehem at all, after the Purification. He leaves out altogether the Flight into Egypt, and the causes of that flight, that is, the persecution of Herod after the Epiphany, which mystery also he passes over altogether. The mention, therefore, of the removal would be out of place in St. Luke. This is one of the difficulties which arise from considering the Evangelists as aiming at giving, each of them, a complete history—a misconception which will involve us in inextricable and altogether gratuitous difficulties throughout the whole course of the Gospel narrative. It is indeed one of a class of difficulties which no one who has studied the Gospels critically ought for a moment to entertain.

Another consideration may be added, which is not exactly a critical consideration in the common sense of the terms, but which ought to have much

weight with the devout students of the Gospels. We have just been considering the prophecy of the holy Simeon, as the first formal revelation made to our Blessed Lady, of the sword of sorrow which was to pierce her soul, in consequence of the persecution of our Lord by the world. It does not seem easy to overrate the importance, in the dealings of God with her, of this solemn inauguration, if we may so speak, of our Blessed Lady as the Mother of Sorrows. It must have been accompanied by immense gifts of grace, and by a new spiritual elevation in the Kingdom of God. We have seen that St. Joseph was not to share this unique crown of Mary, and when we consider all that we ordinarily believe, as the result of her most intimate participation in the continual Cross of her Son, we come to look on these words of Simeon almost as a second Annunciation, changing her whole life, and having immense influences on her position in the Church and in Heaven. If this be so, it is surely natural to think that the revelation made and declared by holy Simeon was made before our Lady had had her first taste of the chalice of sorrows after the Epiphany. The instinct of the Church has led her, in arranging, for popular devotion, as in the Rosary of her Dolours, the mysteries of her sorrows, to put the Purification and the prophecy of Simeon before the Epiphany. It is the reasonable order, the only order which can be adopted without doing some apparent violence to the Sacred Text. It is also the order which is naturally suggested by these last considerations of the import of the prophecy of Simeon.

It is, of course, idle to conjecture what may have

been the reasons which may have influenced St. Joseph in coming to the conclusion that it would be better for the Holy Family to reside permanently at Bethlehem than at Nazareth. But it is easy to see that he and our Blessed Lady must have parted with regret from the scene of the Birth of our Lord. It may even have been with some feeling about honouring of the shrine which had been the place where so many marvels had taken place, of being constantly on the spot where it might be kept sacred, and the like, that it was decided to remove to Bethlehem. Tradition tells us that our Lady was the first in the Church to practise the devotion to the Way of the Cross and the other holy places which are connected with the history of the Passion. If this be so, it might be in the same holy spirit that she and her holy Spouse might place themselves, at this time, near the spot of the Nativity. It is true that the Incarnation itself had taken place at Nazareth, but in the Incarnation there was nothing visible and tangible to be commemorated by the devotion to a particular spot. Our Lady herself was the shrine of the Incarnation. If the Holy Family went away from Bethlehem, the spots hallowed by the Nativity might be forgotten, or at least no honour to God in remembrance of the events which had happened there would be paid by any one.

Thus there might be many reasons why Bethlehem should be thought the natural place of their home. If we add to this any desire for greater retirement and obscurity than could be found at Nazareth, there might be enough motives for the

change on the part of St. Joseph, while Providence might have brought it about for another reason of His own, in order that the Wise Kings of the East might find our Lord on the spot which had been chosen for His entrance into the world, in accordance with the prophecies. Thus, what the edict of Augustus had been in the securing that He should be born at Bethlehem, the prudence or devotion of His parents may have brought about with regard to the Epiphany, when He was to be manifested to the Gentile pilgrims from the East. It was nevertheless ordained that He should after all be brought up at Nazareth, and this arrangement, again, required, as we are told, a change of plan in the counsels of St. Joseph. But it is clear that but for the fear of Archelaus, of which we shall presently hear, he would have gone to Bethlehem again, on his return from Egypt. It is therefore natural to suppose that that is the place at which he would have remained after the Epiphany, if it had not been necessary to retire for a time from the savage persecution of Herod. Nazareth was to have its time again, after the Flight into Egypt. It was to be the spot on earth in which by far the greater part of our Lord's Life was spent. Prophecy had spoken of this also, as St. Matthew points out, and it must have been a confirmation of faith to the Christians for whom the Evangelists note that so it was. But both the witness and the fulfilment of prophecy show that it was most naturally to be expected that He should be called, not a Nazarene, but a Bethlehemite, that the Son of David should have lived, as well as have been born, in the city of David.

CHAPTER IX.

THE STAR IN THE EAST.

St. Matt. ii. 1—12; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 12.

WHAT has been said in the last chapter will be enough to explain the grounds on which the opinion rests, that the Holy Family had removed from Nazareth to Bethlehem within some short space of time after their return to Galilee, which took place, as St. Luke tells us, immediately after the Purification. There seem to be good reasons for thinking, as we may presently see, that the visit of the Wise Kings from the East, which is the next incident in the Gospel narrative, and which took place after any removal, such as is here supposed, of the Holy Family to Bethlehem, must have happened at least four months after the Birth of our Lord. The reasons for this will be given presently. There is also very good and sufficient reason, notwithstanding the varying opinions of critics as to a matter which it does not seem possible to settle finally and beyond all risk of mistake, that the Nativity of our Lord at Bethlehem happened on the day on which we still keep it, that is, on the 25th of December. If this be so, it is not at all impossible that the Epiphany may have taken place soon after the

Pasch next ensuing. This would be after the Purification and the return of the Holy Family to Galilee. At that Pasch it would have been necessary for them to be present at Jerusalem, which was in the near neighbourhood of Bethlehem, for the celebration of the feast. Thus they may have made the same journey for both purposes, that of accomplishing their change of abode, and that of obeying the Law of the festival. If the change of residence of which we have been speaking, was never contemplated by them, the occurrence of the festival may have taken them to Jerusalem, and they may have been paying a visit of devotion to the spot of the Nativity at the time when they were found there by the Wise Kings. They must have sojourned in Bethlehem for at least the six weeks required by the Law, before the rite of Purification could be performed, and in that space of time they may well have made a few friends in the city itself, who might give them hospitality for a few days.

We now pass on to the next great mystery in the Life of our Lord, a mystery of transcendent beauty, as well as of the highest importance. Up to the time at which we have now arrived in the history of the Incarnation, everything had been carried on with great secrecy and silence. The nearest approach to publicity in the unfolding of the series of the great mysteries, had been the mission of the Shepherds by the Angels to worship the newly-born King. That must have made the birth of the marvellous Child known to many in the neighbourhood of Bethlehem. But the Shepherds were poor simple folk in the eyes of the world, and

it is not likely that much attention would be paid to their story except by people of their own station and condition. The scene in the Temple at the Purification, ennobled, in the eyes of the world, by the part taken in it by so distinguished a person as Simeon, was still a passing incident, occupying but a few moments, and it probably was almost unnoticed by the crowds which thronged the Temple at the time. A few devout souls were informed of what had passed, and of the presence of the Holy Child, by Anna the prophetess. Such persons are usually silent and reserved as to the marvels which God may work. They went on with their prayers and fastings, with a fresh sense of joy, with hearts bounding with hope and gratitude, but they are not likely to have made known what had passed in such a way as to strike the public attention. The priests went on with their daily services. The intrigues of ambition, the designs of covetousness, and the pursuit of sensual indulgence, were as rife as ever. The city was the seat of a magnificent and voluptuous Court, under a Sovereign who kept his subjects in perpetual alarm as to what might be the next of his tragical caprices. The Lord had come to His Temple, and had left it without being recognized.

Suddenly the inhabitants of the city were startled by a strange rumour. A small company of distinguished strangers, evidently, from their bearing, appearance, and suite, men of opulence, rank, and authority, appeared in the streets of Jerusalem and asked for the new-born King of the Jews. "When Jesus, therefore, had been born in Bethlehem of

Juda in the days of King Herod, behold, there came Wise Men from the East to Jerusalem, saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East, and are come to adore Him."

The Gospel narrative gives us scanty information as to the persons thus spoken of. It was little to St. Matthew, and the early Church for which he wrote, in what region of the East the home of the strangers lay, what was their exact rank, their number, or the length of the journey which they had taken. St. Matthew was anxious chiefly to add another link to the chain of prophetical fulfilments in the history of our Lord, which he was weaving for the sake of the consolation and confirmation in the faith of the Jewish Christians. He has already proved that in our Lord was fulfilled the great prophecy of Isaias, about the Virgin who was conceiving and bearing a Son, and now he is intending to show how the prophecy of Micheas about the place of the birth of the coming King was also fulfilled in his Master. The earliest Christians, also, for whom the Gospels were originally written, had but little anxiety to preserve for those who might come after them the details which were not, in themselves, all important. They expected, probably, that the world would soon end. In any case, they were too much absorbed in the spiritual blessings which they enjoyed, for the indulgence even of the holiest curiosity. This mystery took place quite thirty years before our Lord began to preach, and the generation which might have furnished the information was in great part passed away, when the

Church began to spread, and the written Gospels began to be required.

Tradition has added to our knowledge very little beyond what is stated in the Sacred Text. We may be sure from the latter that the Magi were men of importance, and that they came from a great distance. Tradition makes them out to have been Kings, and that may well have been the case from the manner in which they were treated by Herod. The name of King is of very wide application, and it may mean little more than the sheik of some wandering tribe. Isaias mentions the Kings of the East as doing honour to our Lord or His Church, and here is another confirmation of the common tradition. It is clear that they could not have been very many in number, and that the sensation which they created was occasioned rather by their evident dignity, the simplicity and boldness of their bearing, and the immense importance of the question which they asked. The whole Jewish nation was ardently looking for a King. Herod must have known of this expectation, and of the Scriptural and traditional grounds on which it was founded. He had no right to the throne, he was the nominee of a foreign power, although he was also, in a certain sense, the maker of his own fortunes. He could not but know that he was hated as much as he was feared by his own subjects. Few sovereigns, in any time or place, have shed so much of the blood of their subjects and nearest relatives as he. No one was safe from his suspicious and crafty violence. Thus, whether the King had been born or not, it mattered very much whether the people thought so.

Herod's throne was already shaken, even though he had all the legions of Augustus at his back, if it came to be pŏpularly believed that the promised King was born.

What had these strangers to adduce as the authority for their question, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East, and are come to adore Him?" It is natural that, in the first place, we should remember that the Sacred Scriptures, besides the long roll of prophecies which belonged to the holy people, contain many prophecies of another class, which refer to the history and populations of all the whole world, with one at least of which the words of the Magi at Jerusalem may well be connected. The Book of Numbers contains the singular history of the prophet or soothsayer Balaam, who was sent for by Balac, the King of Moab, to curse the Israelites. The prophetical utterances of this enemy of the chosen people were all, by the Providence of God, made to take the form of blessings, and at the close of the series we have the celebrated prophecy of the star. "I shall see Him, but not now. I shall behold Him, but not near. A star shall rise out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall spring up from Israel, and shall strike the chiefs of Moab, and shall waste all the children of Seth."[1] The first part of the prophecy reminds us, to some extent, of the famous passage in Job about the resurrection,[2] and it is not impossible that Job and Balaam may have been nearly contemporaries. In any case, they lived under the same primitive or patriarchal dispensa-

[1] Numbers xxiv. 17. [2] Job xix. 26.

tion, though Balaam appears to have been an unwilling instrument in the hands of God in his prophecies concerning Israel, against which people he seems to have been actuated by national prejudice or even hatred. It is generally thought that the prophecy of Balaam, which was probably an echo of the universal tradition of the promise of redemption, was preserved among some of the Oriental nations, and had thus come down to the time of the Magi.

That supposition is often confirmed by the known fact, that in the East there were people who had among them many diligent students of the stars. It may or may not have been the case that the Magi with whom we are concerned were thus devoted to astronomy. The existence of the prophecy of Balaam is enough to account for their being prepared for the apparition of a marvellous star, about the time when, by the convergent testimonies of so many other Divine intimations, the long-expected Deliverer might be supposed to be at hand. For we must not limit the expectation of the Messias to the Jews alone. The whole world was, more or less, sensible of its need, and the sense of a universal need is enough to beget the expectation of its remedy in those in whose hearts the idea of God's Providence has not been obliterated.

It is not easy to see how any particular appearance in the heavens would of itself suggest to these watchers in the East the truth that the Deliverer was born, unless they had some prophecy to refer to. But, with this prophecy, they would require little more. But we must naturally suppose these Wise Princes to have been men of much piety and

depth of religiousness. If they had not been saintly souls, they would probably not have been selected by God as the agents in the great mystery of the Epiphany, nor would they have had the virtues which are displayed in their conduct as far as we know it. Not every man in their position would leave his home at such an intimation as that which they had received. There was nothing to repay the toils of their long journey except the reward of faith. The spiritual blessing which had been bestowed on the devout Simeon and Anna, of seeing the Light of the Gentiles and the Glory of Israel, would have had no attractions for these strangers, unless they had shared in the enlightenment and in the longing for our Lord which were found in Simeon and in Anna. It is impossible to doubt that when they saw the star, it was after long prayer and eager desire for the fulfilment of the prophecy in which the hopes of all the world were enshrined. If this was the case, it is reasonable to think that some Divine light was vouchsafed to them, by means of which they were able to understand the meaning of the star which they saw, and the implied invitation which it conveyed to them to go and do homage to our Lord.

The Divine purpose which was served in this great mystery is revealed to us, in some measure, by the character of these Wise Men, as well as by the means which were used to draw them to our Lord. They have always been considered as the first-fruits of the Gentile Churches. The promise had been originally made to the whole race of Adam, and it was meet that, when it was accomp-

lished, this act of the faithfulness of God should be answered to by homage and adoration on the part of representatives, at least, of the whole race. It was fitting that there should be this proof that, not even among the Gentiles, who were outside the covenant made with Abraham and the Law given by Moses, was the original promise forgotten. This implied that the truth had been handed on traditionally through all the generations which had lived since the Fall, that it had not only been handed on as a sterile prediction, but that it had been the motive and the spring of faithful service to God in the observance of the natural law, of faith and hope practically exercised, of contrition for sin, of longing for and confidence of pardon by means of the promised deliverance. So much, at least, was implied in the presence of these Gentiles at the feet of our Lord.

We are almost always inclined to be far too narrow in our conceptions of the state of the world before the coming of our Lord, especially with regard to the provisions made by God for mankind, and the extent to which those provisions had been fruitful in particular cases. It is quite true that the picture of the heathen world, morally and spiritually, if it were truly set before us, would be too appalling for us to bear, as it is probable that a moment's glance into Hell would be enough to take away our senses. But there was always a brighter side to the picture, or rather, the true picture would have contained many bright and consoling lines amid the general darkness. Man started from Paradise with promises which belonged to the whole

race, and by means of the faith which they required, and which they fostered, reconciliation with God was always possible. We need not repeat what has already been said more than once. St. Paul tells us that the Law of Moses did not annul the covenant made, so many generations before, with Abraham, and in the same way it may be said that the covenant with Abraham did not make salvation more exclusively the lot of one people than it had been before. The natural law, witnessed to by conscience, the faith in God, the Creator and Judge, and in a coming deliverer, the broken and contrite heart, the seeking relief and pardon by some simple act of religion, resting on the promised salvation, these were to be found all over the world, and were always available amid the overwhelming mass of error and superstition, which hung like a black cloud over the human race.

In the later centuries, especially, Providence had been active, in its own beautiful and silent way, among the nations of the East, preparing them for the coming redemption, and keeping up among them the remains of earlier dispensations. There were in those countries great numbers of Jews, who were in constant communication with the centre of their polity at Jerusalem. We may remember the significant passage in the Book of the Prophet Daniel, in which the Angel tells the Saint that he had been withstood for some time in his endeavours to help him by the "Prince of Persia," meaning, apparently, that the Angel Guardian of that kingdom had an interest in retaining the captive Jews among his own nation, for the sake of their good

example, and their possession of the truths of religion, which might be communicated by their means to the race more immediately under his charge.[5] If this is the true interpretation of the passage, it represents to us how beneficial to the heathen around them must have been the sojourn of the Jewish exiles.

It is highly probable that this state of things prevailed over large portions of the Eastern countries beyond the Euphrates. Almost in every large city there were probably communities of Jews who were in some degree, at least, centres of light to their immediate neighbours. We are here concerned with the effect which their presence must have had for good on the large class of heathen who were endeavouring to live up to the light which they possessed, without becoming formally proselytes to the Jewish religion. They would doubtless be much aided and confirmed in their own faith by the contact of the chosen people. A comparatively small number of the whole multitudes of the Captivity could have returned to Judæa, and, besides the captives from Juda properly so called, there were in the East the remains of the much larger number of captives of the ten tribes who did not remain faithful to the House of David and the Temple at Jerusalem at the time of the schism of Jeroboam. These have never been traced, but it is reasonable to think that, wherever their dispersion led them, they would be at least far raised above the people in whose midst they lived. Nor, as has been said, is it necessary for us to suppose that all traces of primitive religion had been

5 Daniel x. 13.

lost, especially among the peoples of Central Asia, where life and manners were more simple, and the forms of superstition less corrupt.

In truth, the presence of these strangers in Jerusalem, brought by the good Providence of God to the feet of the new-born Saviour of the whole race, is a witness to us that there had been many in every generation in the countries in which they lived, who had the same faith and who lived upon the same promises. What they had received, they had received from tradition of their own forefathers, though they may have had, as it appears certain they had, the prophecies of the ill-fated Balaam, and though they may have had, from their intercourse with the Jews of the Dispersion, a much larger knowledge of other sacred predictions than we might think likely at first sight. But in any case, whether the tradition on which they acted in their interpretation of the miraculous star was shared by them with many or with few, their presence at Jerusalem was a striking testimony, brought about by Divine Providence, to the truth that He had not left Himself without witness among the heathen, and that, all through the many centuries of the life of the human race upon the earth, He had listened to their prayers and accepted whatever there was among them of faith, and their acts of simple homage and contrition for sin. Thus this incident of the Epiphany sets before us the whole of this careful Providence of God over the heathen world, in time past, as well as the truth which was so soon to become the great revelation of the Christian Church to the world, the secret of which St. Paul

speaks as having been so long kept back, that the Gentiles were to share with the Jews in the blessings of the new Kingdom.

The mystery of the vocation of the Gentiles to the Church seems at times to fill the large heart of the Apostle with ecstatic delight, although he could not but see that it involved, for a time at least, the rejection of his own people. He saw how large a space this dispensation of the mercy of God filled in the scroll of prophecy, how full the sacred books were of the glories of the Church when she had expanded her borders and opened her treasures to the whole race of mankind. We are apt to forget that this Providential arrangement, by which we ourselves have profited, was an immense difficulty to the early Christians of the Circumcision, and the cause of much persecution and suffering to the Apostle, who became identified with it in the minds of his fellow-countrymen. St. Matthew, who is above all others, and primarily, the Evangelist of the Jewish communities, seems never to fail to seize an occasion which presents itself for bringing out this characteristic of the Kingdom of our Lord. It was probably the delight of the hearts of the Apostles, and those immediately around them, but they may have had much difficulty in softening the national prejudices among the mass of the Jewish converts themselves. We see much of this in the history of St. Paul in the Acts.

Thus we can see here that, though the first Evangelist is primarily intent on adducing the Prophetic proof of the fact that our Lord was born where it was foretold that He should be born, he still makes

these Gentile saints very prominent figures in his narrative, and describes their worship of our Lord in words which show their wealth and rank as well as their fulness of faith. And, indeed, to the people of Jerusalem or of Bethlehem their sudden appearance must have been by far the most striking of all the incidents of the Infancy of our Lord. They represented, in truth, a long and most wonderful history of God's dealings with mankind, unrecorded, even in the briefest hints, in the sacred records themselves. But it was not easy for the Jews of the Evangelical or Apostolic age, to appreciate fully, nor can even we appreciate fully, the importance in the counsels and mercies of God, of the past which they inherited and of the future which they presaged. The Sacred Heart alone, awaiting, on the knees of Mary, the homage of these strangers, could rightly appreciate and give thanks for all the coming glories which were thus represented.

It is true that the time will come, at the end of the world, when the Jewish Church will have her day of triumph. But the great achievements of the religion of Jesus Christ will for ever have been those of the Gentile believers. It will always have been the Gentile Church that overcame the Empire of Rome, that founded Christian civilization by the conversion and renovation of the barbarians of the north, when they invaded the Roman world, that withstood the enormous power of the false prophet, that opened the new worlds in the East and in the West to the preaching of the Cross, that preserved learning in the world, and prepared and guided that new cultivation of the intelligence which has given

birth to all that is great and beautiful in modern progress. The work of the Church has been marred by a thousand failures, inflicted on her by the unfaithfulness of her own children, and in particular by the spirit of division and nationalism, which has torn kingdom after kingdom from that allegiance to the central throne on which the healthy progress of religion and the Church, as well as all true prosperity, depend. But such as it is, the work of the Gentile Church has been a work which nothing but a Divine power could bring about, and it has been illustrated by glories of heroic virtue and achievements of personal sanctity in large masses of the children of Adam, which have delighted and astonished the blessed citizens of Heaven themselves.

It was therefore almost requisite, as it might seem, for the glory of God, summing up the work that His grace had already wrought during so many centuries in the world outside the narrow limits of the Jewish polity, and presaging and culling the first-fruits and promise of the triumphs of His grace in the future, that there should be a certain kind of magnificence and display, before the world itself, of the first manifestation of the Incarnate King to the Gentiles. Thus there is a great contrast between the Epiphany and the mysteries which have preceded it in the history of the Sacred Infancy. Our Lord comes to His own among the Jews, and they receive Him not. He has to find Himself a shelter in a cave, even in His own royal city. But if His own receive Him not, those who are not called His own, though they are in truth His, now show their loyalty, not by receiving Him, but by coming from

a distance to find Him out and be received by Him. There is secrecy and obscurity about the worship which is paid to Him by the shepherds, who are themselves persons, rich indeed in virtue and simple faith, but in no way conspicuous in the eyes of the world. On the other hand, the Gentiles send their kings, their rich ones, to the cradle of Jesus Christ. Our Lord had gone up into His own Temple, as the Prophet had foretold, and who had been able to speak of His coming? It had been a hidden grace and delight to a few devout souls. But the guardians of the shrine, the priests ministering at the altar, the Scribes learned in the sacred writings, the rulers and leaders of the people, sitting in the seat of Moses, had no word or sign of honour for Him, no homage to pay to Him, for Whom the whole of the system of Moses and the Prophets was but a preparation. But the Gentiles come and rouse them all up, Herod on his throne, the Chief Priests and Scribes of the people, and all Jerusalem with them, and they draw from them an authentic testimony to the truth as to which they are in search, and then pass on to worship at the feet of the new-born King in the name of the whole world. Their gifts are royal, their persons are royal, their conduct is royal. Herod and Jerusalem, who can serve them with the information of which they are in need, have no power at all to hinder them, or to injure them after they have accomplished their purpose. They are evidently brought thither by God, and God protects them all through. He permits their visit, indeed, to be made the occasion of the first great outburst of cruel persecution in the history of the Kingdom

of His Son. But He does this because so it suited His counsels that it should be, and He shields them, as well as the Holy Family itself, from the plots which had been formed against them. All these things may be considered as adding to the greatness of the occasion of which we are now speaking in the Providence of God.

There is also something to be remarked as to the means by which God in His Providence addressed Himself to these devout souls. If we are to consider them as representing the Gentile Church, it is natural that we should find them dealt with by those means of the knowledge of God which were within their reach. We do not know that they possessed the Scriptures of the Old Testament, though the Pentateuch may perhaps have been known to them. The Books of Moses embodied very largely documents as well as traditions far more ancient than the Jewish Lawgiver, and it is not impossible that some of these may have been preserved among other nations as well as among the Jews. But Scripture and the more particular revelations made to the chosen race, were, at all events primarily, the property of that race alone. The last age before the Incarnation had, indeed, witnessed a wonderful preparation of the heathen world for the truths o the Gospel by the dispersion of the Jews over the Greek Empire, and we know that their sacred books were already in the possession of thousands among the heathen.

Still, as a general rule, God dealt with the nations outside, as has been said, by the law written in their conscience, by primeval tradition and

promise, and He revealed Himself to them, largely and munificently and lovingly, in the creation in which He placed them and in His Providence over His creatures. When, therefore, He warned these holy men of the execution of His long promised design for the deliverance of the world, it was fitting that He should do so by means of one of the noblest and most magnificent of His visible though inanimate creatures. The heavens above them had long been their text-book, in which they might read many wonderful lessons of His Power, His Beauty, His Glory, His Providence. Now, that He was to innovate on the course of His ordinary Providence by the ineffable mercy of the Incarnation, in which He transcended and surpassed all His habitual beneficence, it was in the order of reason that He should do so by the miraculous appearance of a star which, they must have known at once, implied that the Almighty Creator of the Universe was manifesting His own presence and action by a new creation in the physical order. The new-born King was to be the Lord of Heaven and Earth, of things visible and invisible. Thus the visible creation did Him homage in this marvellous star, and the nations outside the Covenant of Abraham were appealed to in that manner of manifestation which had already been chosen for the revelation of God to them.

The new manifestation implied more than this. It signified, in the words of St. Paul, that God was the God of the Gentiles as well as of the Jews. He had chosen one nation to be the special heir and custodian of His promises, but He had never laid

aside His care for the whole race, or His design of their universal salvation. Still more, even than this. For, in this marvellous mystery of the Epiphany, it is the Gentile Church that rouses up the Jewish nation, priests as well as people, the Scribes, Pharisees, learned in the Law, as well as the ignorant peasants and fishermen of Galilee. The Gentiles appear at the gates of Jerusalem itself, and they knock at the doors of the Temple with intelligence of which the worshippers in the Temple were ignorant. For it was in the counsels of Providence that so it should be in the history of the Kingdom of the Incarnation. Men were to come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, to sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom, and the children of the Kingdom themselves were to be cast out. The Gentiles were to go before the Jews into the Church, and blindness was to fall upon Israel, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

We have no very certain information, in the short narrative of St. Matthew, as to the exact time at which the miraculous star appeared to these holy men. There are, however, hints contained in the words of the Evangelist, to which it is well to attend, as it is certain that he would not mention a single detail without a purpose. We gather from these hints that Herod, as we shall see presently, had in his mind a definite space of time which he thought would cover the length of the life of the wonderful Child, and that he had obtained this knowledge from these Princes. This made him order the murder of all the children in Bethlehem and in its neighbourhood who were not more than two

years old. But, again, we are not absolutely certain whether the star was seen at the moment of the Incarnation itself, or at the moment of the Birth of our Lord. The words of the Wise Princes, "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" seem to imply that they understood what they had seen as signifying the Birth rather than the Conception of the Child. It is very likely that a cruel tyrant like Herod would enlarge his order for the sake, as he would deem it, of greater security, and that if he had ascertained that the star had been seen a year before the arrival of the strangers, he would order the massacre of children up to the age of two.

The most reasonable among the many conjectures which have been formed from this statement of St. Matthew seems to be the following. The Wise Princes seem certainly to have told Herod, in answer to his "diligent inquiries," of which the Evangelist speaks, what made him conclude that the Blessed Child might either have passed His first year and might be some way advanced in His second, or that He might not have yet reached the first anniversary of His Birth. If they had told him that He was certainly only a few months old, under the year, he would have slaughtered only the infants under one year. If they had told him that He was certainly more than a year, but not two years old, he would have spared all under one year. It does not seem likely that, if they had set out on their journey soon after the appearance of the star, supposing that appearance to have been about the date of the Nativity, they could have spent so much as a year or more on their way. With all the difference in

the speed of travelling in these days, that length of time would imply that they had come from a very distant part of the East indeed. On the other hand, if we suppose the star to have appeared first at the time of the Incarnation, and then again at the date of the Nativity, this of itself might have been somewhat of a guide to the true meaning of the heavenly message which it was intended to convey. They would naturally conclude that the interval of nine months was meant to signify that the Child had been conceived at the time of the first appearance, and that He had been born at the time of the second.

This, then, may perhaps be the answer to our difficulties about the time of the appearance of the star. If these holy pilgrims had set out on their quest after the second apparition of the star, the distance from which they came might well have been such as to require for ordinary travellers, not loitering on the way, and provided, as these Princes must probably have been provided, with the means of fast travelling, as it might have been thought in those days, the space of between three and five months would be enough for the accomplishment of their journey. The most probable conjecture as to the place from which they came, seems to be that which considers them as inhabitants of some of the countries beyond the Euphrates and the neighbourhood from which Abraham had come into the Promised Land at the command of God. If we may assume this, the journey would be about four months in time. Josephus tells us that some of the Jews from that part of the world took as much as four months

to reach Jerusalem. There are a number of curious details quoted as to these distances from the classical writers, the result of all being that the distance from the countries of Upper Asia would be about that which has been said. It is probable, therefore, that the Wise Princes had been about that time or a little more on the road. If they set out at the Nativity, they would, as has been said, reach Jerusalem about the time of the Pasch or a week or two later. Thus, reckoning the date of our Lord's entrance into the world as fixed by the first appearance of the star, He would be about thirteen or fourteen months old when they arrived at Jerusalem, while, taking the date from the second apparition, He might be three or four or five months old. The Wise Kings, in their great simplicity, probably believed Herod to be as sincere as themselves in his desire to worship the new-born King, and thus they would have no reason for concealing from him the whole of their own experience. Thus they would give him to understand, as has been said, that they expected to find a Child, perhaps in His second year, but certainly not beyond it. Herod would probably have no scruple at all about allowing, in his orders for the massacre, a considerable margin of time in order to secure the death of the Child Whom he so much feared, and it may have been a part of his policy that it should be believed that he had certainly secured his object, in order to guard himself against any lingering hope on the part of the people that the marvellous Child had escaped the sword.

The Wise Princes may not have set out on their journey at once. They must have had time to

confer together, and to make, at least, some preparation. They travelled, it seems, with at least some suite of followers, bearing costly gifts. The question of the exact time, as it has been attempted to fix it by some writers, seems to depend on a number of considerations not all of which can be accepted as certain. Some are perhaps inclined to exaggerate the distance from which these holy men came. Their gifts rather point to some part of Arabia as their country. But these gifts were offered on account of their mystical significance, and it would have been in the power of the Princes to procure them easily, even if they were not all to be found on the spot.

There seems no certain ground for thinking that the star was visible to them during the whole time of their journey. It may have been so, but they speak only of having seen it in the East. It was clearly not visible to them when they arrived at Jerusalem, and on their way to Bethlehem it is said to have appeared, in words that imply that it then appeared afresh, the star which they had seen in the East, filling them with intense joy. They must have known by prophecy and tradition that it was the sign of the Birth of the promised King of the Jews, and the words of Balaam speak of a sceptre as well as of a star. This was enough to guide their footsteps to Jerusalem, as the holy city and capital of the Jews. But this they must have known as well at the outset of their pilgrimage as at its close. On the other hand, guidance would certainly be needed on their approach to Bethlehem, in order that, without further inquiry, they might be led straight to the

house in which they were to find our Lord and His Mother. It is perhaps their guidance by the star on this part of their journey which has given rise to the common idea that it led their steps all the way from their homes. So it might have been, but it is not so said. And it is perhaps more in harmony with the ways of Providence that they should be directed to Jerusalem by the prophecies, and so elicit the authoritative witness of the chief priests as to the designated birthplace of the Messias. These priests were the mouthpieces of the Synagogue, and they were thus made to bear witness against themselves in respect to the fulfilment of the prophecies in our Lord.

The surprise and shock which the Wise Princes must have felt at finding no one in Jerusalem conscious of the great event which was so important to the whole world, and to none more so than to the members and rulers of the holy nation, must have been equalled by the kind of panic which their presence and their bold and simple question produced in the holy city itself. When men are taken unawares, they show what they are, and what is in them. In the alarm which these strangers produced in all cities we can already read the manner in which the advent of the King was to be received by those to whom He was more immediately sent. "King Herod hearing this, was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." That Herod should have been troubled, is no great wonder. He was an usurper, he was hated by his subjects, and, whether he believed the prophecies or not, he was quite aware that his subjects believed them. Probably

no Jew, whether chief priest or peasant, would have ventured in his presence to speak of the coming King. Yet the subject was rife in the thoughts of all, all the more, on account of the brutalities and capricious cruelties of Herod himself. There was a King of the Jews on the throne, and there were the sons of Herod, one of whom might be expected to succeed him in his position, and it might have been thought a kind of treason to ask for another, born to the dignity and rights of the ancient line with which Herod and his family had no connection. Yet here were these bold, simple, plain-speaking strangers, asking for the new-born King.

If the question sent a thrill of uneasiness through the heart of the usurper, it was perhaps scarcely less pleasant to the ears of the chief priests themselves. Never as a class had the hierarchy at Jerusalem been in greater worldly consideration. They shared the prestige and glory of the Temple in which they ministered, which was held in honour all over the Roman Empire, and even beyond its frontiers, on account of the flourishing communities of Jews which were everywhere to be found, and whose national as well as religious loyalty found its centre at Jerusalem. The priests were rich, covetous, ambitious, worldly, and many of them, apparently, stained by still more disgraceful habits of sin. Their position, moreover, was never secure. Herod was a suspicious and unscrupulous master, and his laxity in religious matters, if he had really any religion, was ever and anon likely to break out in some outrage on their traditions and laws which it was almost equally dangerous to resist or to acqui-

esce in. He thought but little of massacres. Indeed, his hands were stained with the blood of great numbers of their order.

Behind Herod was the Roman power, the exercise of which was dependent on the whims of the Emperor, or, worse than that, his lieutenants in Syria. The policy of Rome was, in general, in avour of toleration. It allowed of much internal liberty of administration to the nations who were either completely and openly its subjects, or who were practically such, though governed by rulers of their own. So long as the heavy tributes were paid, they were left in peace. But on one point Rome was a jealous and severe mistress. She could tolerate no true national independence within her Empire. Herod was her nominee, practically responsible to her, and he must keep his dominions in peaceful and unquestioning submission to the world-wide sway of the Cæsar. A national movement, headed by a native King, foretold by the prophets, around whom immense hopes and expectations would gather, would, as the priests could see, be no less obnoxious to Augustus than he would be to Herod himself. The nation was full of violent, turbulent spirits, whose ancestral faith would make them run without hesitation on any danger, fanatics, as these ecclesiastical rulers would deem them, who would have spent their blood and their lives like water, without reckoning whether their opponents were the legionaries of Rome or the mercenaries of the Edomite usurper.

Thus it is easy to understand how "all Jerusalem," as St. Matthew says, are troubled at the arrival of the Eastern Princes, as well as Herod

himself. This was the Holy City deriving all its life from the Temple and the worship of God. It contained all the learning, all the traditional knowledge, all the study of the Sacred Law and the sacred writings, that were to be found in the nation which God had chosen for Himself. And, when the time came for Him to appear, in the execution of His promise of infinite love and condescension, in mortal flesh, to be the Light to illuminate the whole world and to be the especial Glory of Israel, the mere mention of His Advent filled with consternation the hearts of the very highest ministers of His sanctuary and of the inhabitants of the place where His Name was set. But Herod and the chief priests had a work to do for God on this occasion, and they could not escape it. It would have been easy, it may seem to us, for the King to have seized the persons of the holy men from the East, and then to have carried out his inquiries in secret concerning the birthplace of the Child. Or he might have deceived them by some false representations, and sent them to some place, where their faith might have been shaken by disappointment or beguiled by imposture. It is strange how often the wisdom of the world seems to lose its keenness of discernment when it has to deal with the things of God.

There was, perhaps, little of astuteness and kingcraft in the step which Herod actually took. He called together "all the chief priests and scribes of the people and inquired of them where the Christ should be born." Thus the greatest possible homage was done to the questioners, and the most authoritative possible answer to the question was secured. The

question itself was acknowledged to be of supreme importance, and great publicity was given to the fact that it had been put. On such subjects the decision of the Great Council would be considered authoritative and infallible, based as it was on the direct words of the Prophet Micheas. "But they said to him, in Bethlehem of Juda. For so it is written by the Prophet, And thou Bethlehem the land of Juda, are not the least among the princes of Juda, for out of thee shall come forth the Captain that shall rule My people Israel."[1] Thus in the most solemn manner, at the request of the reigning Sovereign, the ecclesiastical authorities of the holy nation, attested that the place where the Messias was born was Bethlehem. The holy strangers were witnesses that they had been led by God to seek out the place, for the precise reason that they had received an intimation that the promised Child was actually born. The two testimonies combined together to give the most overwhelming evidence that our Lord, when He was found at Bethlehem, was the promised Messias.

Did we not know the hardening effects on the human hearts of the kind of life which these chief priests and scribes were leading day after day, it would seem almost incredible that no care should have been taken by them to ascertain the fact of which the Eastern Princes were the witnesses. It would be too much to assert that no one of those present in this assembly was sufficiently interested in the question thus raised to go for himself and see. But at all events the priests and scribes as a body

[1] Micheas v. 2.

took no action at all in consequence of the question put to them by Herod. It is hardly possible that he should not have told them why he asked the question of them, or, in any case, that they should not have been aware of the presence and object of these strangers from a distance. The Wise Princes were simple, open souls, and do not seem to have made any secret of their business. But they met with little sympathy, at least with no open sympathy, from the priests of the Sanctuary of God and the authorized guardians of His oracles.

CHAPTER X.

THE EPIPHANY.

St. Matt. ii 1—12; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 12.

THE great simplicity of the holy Princes made them the easy dupes of the astute craft of Herod, though God had determined in His Providence not to allow them to be injured by their candid openness with the tyrant, who was to be baffled by his own devices. He had probably intended to lay violent hands on them as well as on the Child Whom they came to visit, and he thought it better to leave their homage to be paid without notice or molestation. He carefully informed himself, by the questions which he asked them, as to the length of time which had elapsed since the apparition, or apparitions, of the miraculous star. We have seen what may have been his purpose in this, and it is easy to understand how full he must have been of anxious curiosity as to every detail which concerned the Infant King. It was by this questioning of the Wise Princes that he arrived at the conclusion on which he afterwards acted, in the massacre of the Innocents, that the Child might be less than one year of age, and could not be as much as two. In explanation of this something has already been said.

These blessed Sages had no suspicion, as it appears, of the snare that was being laid for them. It is the privilege of simplicity to think others as simple as itself, to imagine no evil, to trust all and be open with all, and at the same time to be preserved, by the Providence of God, from all the dangers which beset the unguarded and unsuspicious in a world such as this. If Herod had had an Achitophel by his side, he would probably have been counselled not to let them go away unattended. If he had sent an armed guard with them, he might have at once seized on the Holy Child. Perhaps, if he had been himself a counsellor under such circumstances, he would have given the same advice. But he was blinded by the Providence of God, watching over the Child and His visitors alike. So the holy pilgrims set out, perhaps amid the sneers or the silent criticism of many of the inhabitants of the Holy City, to find their way over the few miles which separate Bethlehem from Jerusalem. The King turned to his banquet or the luxurious amusements of his palace. The Priests and Scribes went home or to the Temple, without much thought about the strange witness they had just borne to the truth. Or perhaps, if they were aroused from their worldly lethargy by the presence of the strangers, they feared to compromise themselves with Herod if they took any active part in the adventure on which these strangers were engaged. Some laughed at their credulity, others wondered how Herod had let them go so cheaply, others speculated on the measures on which the crafty tyrant must be brooding for their destruction. The people of Jerusalem knew

their master, and were not inclined to brave the outbursts of his unscrupulous anger.

The story of St. Matthew is so concise, so entirely confined to the necessary features in the mystery, that there may, and indeed must have been, a number of incidents in the stay of the holy Princes in the city before their departure, of which we have no account. We only learn that they were admitted to the King's presence and carefully examined by him, from the necessity which required the mention of this interview when the Evangelist has to explain the reason for the precise order given by Herod as to the massacre of the holy children, after the strangers had departed. We know that there were at least some in Jerusalem who had seen the Holy Child themselves, and who were partners in the Divine secret of His Birth and mission. Simeon could hardly have failed to be among the Scribes and Priests who had been summoned to the palace to give the authoritative answer as to the appointed place of the birth of the Messias. The sensation produced in the city by the appearance of these remarkable strangers could hardly have been unknown to Anna and the little band of devout worshippers in the Temple, who were expecting the consolation of Israel. It is very possible that the Wise Princes had some communication with some of these persons, and have been rejoiced to learn from them that the Holy Child had been seen in the Temple. But we are not told that they knew from whence He had come, much less that they could give any information as to His present abode.

It was the ordinance of God, for many holy pur-

poses of His own, that the Princes should not learn the place of the birth of our Lord by any private information, but by the most solemn and authentic witness of the Jewish Church itself, elicited at the formal request of the secular power then in possession of the throne. But it is pleasant to think that there may have been at least a few chosen souls in that sacred city who cordially sympathized with the strangers in their devotion to the new-born King, that He was not left without some kind of witness when it might have been looked for with the greatest certainty, at this most important moment of the unfolding of the designs of God as to His Person and His mission. The visit of the Kings must have been short. They would be anxious to accomplish their quest, and Herod would be equally anxious not to let them stop in the city to spread the report of the birth of the promised Messias. The priests would look on them as intruders, who could have nothing to do with the King of the Jews if He had come, and whose devotion and faith were rebukes to their hardness and worldliness of heart.

The day may have been far advanced, when the little caravan of the Wise Princes passed out of the Jaffa Gate, as it is now called, on the way to Bethlehem. They hoped to reach the little city before it was deep in the night. Their eager devotion made them press on. There was little in Jerusalem to attact them in comparison with the one great object of their journey, and, however magnificent may have been the Temple with its services and its sacrifices, they were not proselytes, and had perhaps little knowledge of the ceremonial and sacrificial system

of the Mosaic Law. In any case, Jerusalem and the Temple might be left, and might be visited on their return, for they had engaged with Herod that they should come back to give him an account of what they found. So they went on their way, happy and without fear. They had but one thing to do, and they thought of little else. Bethlehem was not a large city, and there, at all events, they might expect little difficulty in finding the marvellous Child. He was evidently unknown, as yet, in Jerusalem, but wonders sometimes make their way but slowly in the public knowledge. Bethlehem would be full of Him, and they would not be received with the strange coldness and surprise which had greeted them in the capital.

Such may have been their thoughts, and then, as they went on their way, and were drawing near to the end of their journey, a bright light shone out in the darkening heavens. The star which they had seen in the East was flaming over the hill on which Bethlehem stood. As has been said, we are not told that it had led them on the way, but only that they had seen it in the East. It may have been visible, not only at the time of the Incarnation and of the Nativity, but at the outset of their journey. At all events, they had lost sight of it when they came to Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the seat of authority, the Synagogue was in many respects in the place now filled by the Catholic Church, and so it belonged to the priests there to interpret the prophecies, by which the birth-place of the Messias had been fixed. It was from them, then, that the Princes were to learn the exact spot of the

Birth of the Child. But Jerusalem had done its office for them, and it only remained for them to find the blessed spot in Bethlehem hallowed by His presence. There could be no official witness as to the house where the Child was to be found, and God chose to lead them to His feet by the same miraculous guidance which had given the first impulse to their adventure.

"And seeing the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." Their faith had had its trial in the cold reception which had met them at Jerusalem. It was not that they themselves were made light of, almost laughed at, as having taken so much pains on an uncertain errand. It was rather that at Jerusalem, if anywhere, they might have hoped to find, not only sympathy for themselves, but, what was far more important, a living and enthusiastic faith in the new-born King and in the work which He was sent on earth to do. This had been wanting in the very centre and capital of that chosen nation out of which the blessing of the universal world was to come. Their simplicity and candour kept them from losing their faith or courage substantially, and perhaps they hardly knew how much the external circumstances which they had encountered had affected their spirits, until the reappearance of the star roused up in their hearts this exceeding great joy. Their joy was the intense spiritual joy with which God can overwhelm the soul when He chooses to pour into it His consolations, to caress it, and shower on it His endearments after a time of desolation and trial. All men are naturally joyous when they see the end of a long enterprise, the success of

an undertaking which has cost them much, especially if the result, which is now close at hand, is a great blessing and a great delight. But beyond this natural joy, we must suppose that the words of the Evangelist signify a joy not simply human, but Divine, a spiritual elevation and happiness which no one but God can give, and which He gives in very large measure indeed to those whom He deems worthy of it. For the saints of God have constantly felt themselves even overstrained, and taxed beyond their power, by the excessive delights with which their souls are visited on such occasions as these. They have been fain to cry out to God to moderate His overpowering visitations, that they may be able to bear them, if it is not His will to take them altogether out of the world to a new state of being, where they may be more fit for such favours.

The star which filled these holy Sages with so much intense joy must probably have appeared to them now, not simply to crown and reward their faithfulness and to console whatever anxiety may have racked their souls, but also for the purpose of guiding their footsteps in the little city which they were approaching. For there also, as well as at Jerusalem, the Child and His Mother were obscure and unknown. If the probable opinion as to the date of the Epiphany be right, all that could be known there would be that the Child had been born there some months before, and that His parents, after a short absence, had come and taken up their abode somewhere in the city. St. Joseph could hardly yet have begun to practise at Bethlehem the trade which he followed at Nazareth, and the home

of such a family, if it was as yet a home, must have been very humble. St. Matthew calls it a house, and a very poor tenement would go by that name. If their present sojourn at Bethlehem was one only of devotion, and for a short time, they may have been close to the cave in which our Lord had been born, if there was not, indeed, some small house opening into it. There is nothing to show that the people of Bethlehem were in any way conscious of the treasure which was in the midst of them. And so, if these remarkable strangers had been left to themselves to find out our Lord, they would have to make inquiries of one person after another, and might have wandered far into the night in their quest for the Child. The star, as St. Matthew tells us, went before them, until it came and stood over the place where the young Child was. They were guided by its motion as long as it moved, and when it stood still over one house they knew that they had reached the end of their search. What was this palace of the King, and who were His attendants and courtiers?

"And entering into the house, they found the young Child, with Mary His Mother." We are not told of any miraculous appearance of majesty about our Lord at the Epiphany, of angels waiting on Him, and the like. It was the faith alone of the Wise Princes, aided by some special supernatural illumination, and strengthened, undoubtedly, by the appearance of the star, which enabled them to discern in Him the fulfilment of the prophecies. He was the Child to Whom the star had led them, and that was enough. The Evangelist also mentions specially the

presence of our Blessed Lady. It was not, indeed, likely that she would be absent from her Child, Who at that tender age was almost always in her arms or at her breast. But this, which would be common to our Lord with all other infants, can hardly be a sufficient reason for the mention of the Blessed Mother in this very short narrative. The words of St. Matthew, which speak of the Wise Princes finding our Lord, refer to the quest for Him on which they had set out. And the words seem to signify that they found that which they sought, and that they sought what they found. That is, they had sought a Child in His Mother's arms.

Here, again, we have a touch given us by St. Matthew, full as he was of the prophecies, reminding us of the origin and the burthen of the whole prophetic cycle. The first great promise of the Redemption made to mankind had spoken of a Woman and her Seed, and all the subsequent prophecies, more or less distinctly, referred to this original promise. The original prophecy had been in the possession of mankind for long centuries before it became the peculiar heirloom, so to speak, of the chosen nation, and it had been carried all over the earth by the children of Noe and the nations which issued from them. Thus to say that the three Wise Princes found the Child with His Mother, is as much as to say that they found the fulfilment of the earliest traditions of redemption which had been the possession of the human race. If these Princes had no knowledge of the distinctly Jewish prophecies—a fact which cannot be assumed without proof—they might have seen in the form of

the prophecy of Balaam a repetition of the original twofold promise made in Paradise. For Balaam had prophesied of a star and a sceptre, as Isaias had prophesied of a rod of Jesse and a flower rising up therefrom. They might have seen the Mother as prefigured in the star, and the Child-King as prophesied in the sceptre. The words of St. Matthew, then, may be understood as showing us that, in the predictions which guided them, they had been brought to expect the Mother as well as the Son.

It is sometimes remarked that there is no mention of St. Joseph in this part of the narrative of the Gospel. It is thought that his name may have been omitted, because it was arranged by the Providence of God that he should be absent from the house at that moment. A reason is assigned for this arrangement, namely, in order that the Wise Princes might not think that he was the father of the Holy Child. This speculation does not seem to have any certain foundation, unless it be in the fact that some great names may be cited as having held it as true. In the first place, as has been said already, the whole of the two first chapters of the Gospel of St. Matthew have the appearance of being derived, indirectly, from St. Joseph himself. He died, indeed, before there were any disciples gathered around our Lord. No one Evangelist, except perhaps St. John, probably had seen and known him, and thus it is not easy to see how any part of the Gospel story can be traced to him. It must, however, be remembered that our Lord's relatives at Nazareth were numerous, and it is far from unlikely that St. Matthew may

have drawn his materials from some of them. The genealogy which is found in his first chapter, seems evidently to come from that side. It is an old family document, fragmentary in many parts. And these two chapters are, in the same way, just what might be expected from St. Joseph. They give us his witness to the facts in which he was mainly concerned, in the shortest possible words. They mention his betrothal, his difficulty, the vision whereby he was enjoined to take to him his wife, the virginal character of her conception, the Epiphany as introducing the flight into Egypt, the massacre of the Innocents, and the return of the Holy Family to Galilee. In áll these mysteries and incidents St. Joseph is personally concerned, as the principal agent, the person to whom the communications of the will of God are made. The Evangelist uses them all as furnishing occasion to his proofs about our Lord drawn from prophecy, and this gives us a sufficient account of the whole of these chapters.

In the mystery of the Epiphany, St. Joseph had no special part, and it is only when the flight into Egypt becomes necessary, that his action, so to say, begins. It is, therefore, not to be wondered at that his name should be omitted. He would omit himself wherever he could. It is, therefore, very probable that this is the simple reason for the absence of any mention of him in the Epiphany. It is not easy to see how the belief that our Lord was the Son of Joseph would have been a trial to the faith of the holy Princes, if it was not such to the multitudes of believers, who must have shared in the popular supposition for a time. Nor is it clear how the mere

fact that no one was present, as the husband of our Blessed Lady, when these Eastern Sages paid their homage to our Lord, would have been any proof to them that the Child Whom they worshipped had no earthly father. And, lastly, here also we have seen one of those tacit references to prophecy of which the first Gospel is so full. We have already said that St. Matthew may here have in his mind the first prophecy. It spoke of a Child and a Mother, not of a Father.

"And entering into the house, they found the Child with Mary His Mother, and falling down they adored Him, and opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh." The adoration offered by these Princes to our Lord must, of course, be considered to have been that kind of worship which, in their minds, corresponded to His dignity. We are left to gather how far their intelligence of His Person penetrated the secret of His Divine Nature, from the gifts which they presented to Him. We have no other way of arriving at any conclusion, except so far as the whole story of their pilgrimage implies what may help us in this respect. There can be no doubt that they considered Him as One promised by prophecy, as One Whose entrance into the world was of importance enough, in the counsels of God, to be heralded by the appearance of a miraculous star. Thus we are able to judge from their pilgrimage, from their demeanour at Jerusalem, and from the gifts which they offered, how far they understood the prophecies or traditions, which they had received, to signify Who He was and what was His Mission in the world. If we

take the common Christian interpretation of these gifts alone, we are at once led to the conclusion that they recognized Him as King, as God, and as Redeemer. Gold is the offering made to kings, incense is offered to God, and myrrh signifies death, and funeral honours paid to the dead. But if one Person was to be at once King and God, and to die, it must be that He is God, the King of men by means of the Incarnation, and that He dies for men to bring about their redemption. Thus the offerings of these Princes furnish to us, it may be said, their traditional commentary on the promise made to our first parents in Paradise. In the Seed of the Woman they see the Incarnate God, the Head and King of the human race, and in the crushing of the serpent's head and in the lying wait of the serpent on the heel of the conqueror, they see the redemption of the world wrought out by the suffering of the Incarnate Son of God on the Cross.

If this be so, we can see in this mystery of the Epiphany far more than a simple act of piety and devotion. These Eastern Sages were not brought by Divine Providence from so great a distance simply to pour out their hearts in tender thankfulness for an unknown and uncomprehended boon. They are witnesses to the faithfulness of God in fulfilling His promises made from the beginning of the world. But they are also witnesses to the enlightenment as to the meaning of those promises which God had vouchsafed at the beginning, and which was handed on from generation to generation, principally, no doubt, in the holy nation, but also, how largely we may never guess, among other descen-

dants from Adam and from Noe. We see here, as we see in the story of Job, that to the whole race of mankind was originally given the hope of a future Redeemer, Who was to be God Himself. We see the knowledge that, by means of faith in the future Redemption, it was possible for men to reconcile themselves to God long before it came. It is this original revelation to the human race which is, as it were, brought to the feet of our Lord in the Epiphany. The Wise Princes represent a long line of ancestry, for it is clear that, however marvellous may have been the personal enlightenment which they had received, the knowledge which their homage testified was in the main traditional. Who shall say how widely this knowledge had been spread, who shall count up the thousands and thousands of souls who will be found, in the last day, to have profited by it? Thus, if the Epiphany had been wanting in the marvellous cycle of these early mysteries of our Lord, we should have been without this distinct and positive testification to the goodness of God in the original manifestation of His designs, and in the graces which He supplied, in order to enable so many to make use of that manifestation to the saving of their souls.

It requires comparatively a short space to relate the details of this beautiful mystery of the Epiphany, but all students of the ways of God as manifested to us in the Life of our Lord, must be prepared to find in such history very great depths of meaning and wonderful revelations of the character of God and of His work in the Incarnation. Something has already been said of the Epiphany as viewed in this

light, but it may be well, before we proceed further, to spend a short time at the feet of our Lord in His Mother's arms, as these Wise Princes did, and consider the mystery in some of its many various aspects.

In the first place, we must remember that all the mysteries of our Lord's Life were the instruction of the Holy Angels in the ways and works of God, even when they were most of all hidden from the eyes of men. The Epiphany was indeed to become a second feast of the Nativity of our Lord to the multitudes of the Gentile believers. All over the world it is celebrated by them, and they look on it as the point in the series of these mysteries of the Holy Infancy in which they and their own children have the most lively personal interest. But they and their children were still in the future, and the only spectators of the scene in the house at Bethlehem were the Holy Angels, with Mary and her blessed Spouse. But anything new in the way of a manifestation of God was an immense joy to the heavenly host, more numerous by far than the whole multitudes of men, who were going about their ordinary occupations with so little concern, while our Lord was receiving the homage of these pilgrims in that little room. And we can see that to them at least, who could understand what it was that God was doing, the sight must have been a very marvellous revelation of His power, His holiness, and His mercy, as well as of that beautiful faithfulness of His, on which our Blessed Lady has taught us to dwell with loving gratitude. Let us think a few moments on each one of these attributes of God as shown in the Epiphany.

It will not take us long to find there the display of His power. In the first place, the manner in which the holy Sages were led to the cradle of our Lord was a work of great power. In the physical order, a new star was created, to perform with the utmost faithfulness the task of guiding and enlightening the Sages on their way. This was the work of the Creator of heaven and earth, and no one but Him. But a greater work than the formation of this new star was the work of grace in the hearts of these Princes, the interior vocation corresponding to the outward invitation, enabling them to understand its meaning, to recognize in it the fulfilment of the prophecies, and an intimation that it was the desire of God that, as they had received this invitation they should accept it at the cost of no light labours and difficulties, and betake themselves to the distant country where they might hope to find the Blessed Child, Whose birth was thus announced to them. When their journey was once begun, the power of God must have been constantly manifested as they went along, and at last, when they reached the holy city, it was the power of God, ruling the hearts of kings, even the most hostile, to His honour, that brought about the witness of the Jewish Church to the oracles of prophecy, and which fixed beyond a doubt the actual spot where their quest was to meet its reward. When they were once again on their road, there was a fresh manifestation of Divine power, in the reappearance of the star, and a far greater display of spiritual power in the graces which enabled the holy Sages to discern the Lord of heaven and earth in His humiliation, and not to

take scandal at all the many circumstances which must have been a trial to their faith. We shall have to speak presently of the virtues displayed by the Princes as they knelt in homage before our Lord, all of which were marvellous instances of Divine grace working in their hearts.

The holiness of God was displayed in this mystery, as in the Incarnation itself, of which it was the manifestation to men. The Child Who was adored by the Princes was the Incarnate Holiness of God, the persons concerned in the mystery were all wonderful instances of the holiness which had been derived from the Blessed Child by them, the object of the revelation of His coming to the Gentiles was the sanctification of millions of souls by faith and other virtues founded thereon, and the means by which the ends of His coming were to be attained were all holiest in themselves. And at the same time the whole dispensation was one of the most exceeding mercy, as well as of great faithfulness on the part of God. He could not forget that He was the Creator of all men made after His own image, and that by that title alone they had a large right to His fatherly care, notwithstanding their many excesses and rebellions against His law, the outrages which they had heaped upon His honour, the falsehoods which they had attributed to Him, in their wild conceptions concerning Him. He could not forget that He had promised this deliverance from the very beginning of the world, and that no unfaithfulness on the part of man should be allowed to cancel the bond which He had pledged Himself to observe. If it was a great instance of His faithful-

ness that He had not utterly cast aside His care for His own chosen people, after so many rebellions and transgressions, it was an instance of still greater faithfulness that He retained His merciful designs for the nations who had wandered so far away from Him and outraged His laws so far more grievously.

Any single manifestation of the faithfulness of God to His promises is a fresh confirmation of hope in all other promises of His which yet remain unfulfilled. Thus, to the blessed inhabitants of Heaven, who knew so well all that is contained in the predictions of Holy Writ, the vocation of the Sages of the East to the feet of our Lord was an earnest that all the glories of the Church, as promised in the Evangelical Prophet, were to have their accomplishment. Sparing indeed had been the selections made in the Providence of God of those who were to be allowed to share in the privileges of the first worshippers of the new-born King. The rich and the great of the Jewish nation had been passed over, and none but a few simple shepherds, Simeon and Anna, and some others with them, had been made aware of the existence upon earth of the Child of Mary. The chosen nation had been represented, but only by these few blessed souls. But now from the far East others are called to share the blessing with them, and they are the noblest, the wisest, and the most conspicuous even in the eyes of the world, of the peoples from among whom they are called. They are allowed to bring the treasures even of this world in homage to the throne of Him Who, being rich with all the treasures of Heaven, became poor and despised for our sakes. They might well be con-

sidered as the first-fruits of a very glorious harvest indeed of redeemed souls, subjects of the new Kingdom.

The glory which accrued to our Lord Himself from the presence of these loyal visitors was greater in many ways than any which he had received since His Birth, if we except the homage paid to Him by the angels, and the ineffably precious worship of our Lady and St. Joseph. For these Kings came from a great distance, with at least some pomp and ceremony, they were personages of much consideration themselves, they attracted to Him the attention of many others also. Moreover, their gifts, very precious in themselves, perhaps, were significant of a faith which confessed Him as King and God, as well as Man. The adoration which they paid Him was all the more significant because of the very humble circumstances in which they found Him. It was a sort of compensation for the neglect with which He had met at Bethlehem, and therefore it was very fitting that where He had been driven to find shelter in a cave and stable, there also He should be worshipped and honoured in the most striking manner by the Kings who came from afar. Bethlehem was to give Him honour in another way, in consequence of this very act of homage now paid to Him. For it was this visit of the Eastern Kings that brought about the sacrifice of the first flowers of the martyrs, as the Church sings, in the massacre of the Innocents. And the honour thus done to the Son could not but be reflected on His Blessed Mother, and, as has been said, if these Sages inherited the traditional promise made to the first parents of mankind in

Paradise, the language of that promise would have prepared them with some knowledge of the eminent greatness of the Mother in the Kingdom of her Son. She was the woman between whom and Satan enmities were placed by God.

We may thus consider the Epiphany as a mystery in which very great honour was done to God by the reflection and acknowledgment of so many of His great attributes. There is another side from which this mystery may be considered, namely, the side of the great and signal virtues and graces which shine out in the holy Princes themselves. If God was wonderful in the external Providence by which He called them, invited them, guided them to the feet of our Lord, and protected them against all dangers and deceits, He was also very wonderful in the graces with which His external Providence was accompanied. We are ignorant of their history before they appear as the faithful searchers for Jesus Christ, but from that moment they are perfect patterns of correspondence to Divine grace, having moreover a character of their own which reminds us of the simple faith and courage of Abraham, the father of the faithful, who left his home and his father's house at the bidding of God, not knowing whither he was to go. The whole of their history is full of pre-eminent graces. The sight of the star, together with their knowledge of the revealed promises of God concerning the salvation of the human race, might have been shared with them by others under the same circumstances. It required a devout and very high estimate of the importance of salvation and the dignity of Him by Whose means it was to be im-

parted to mankind, to prepare them to close with the invitation as they did, indeed to see in it anything addressed to themselves in particular. They must have had a love for the promised Saviour, a desire and yearning for the salvation which He was to bring with Him, a great courage and detachment from the things of this world, a strong and firm resolution, and much generosity, they must have been buoyed up by a strong and joyous faith, and their demeanour throughout shows how fully they possessed the golden grace of simplicity.

It was no slight trial to their faith to be received so coldly at Jerusalem. We do not know for how far on their journey they were accompanied or guided by the miraculous star, but they had certainly lost sight of it before they came to the holy city, and as they do not mention its disappearance, it seems natural to conjecture that it had been seen by them only before they left their homes. In any case they knew that Jerusalem was the place in which the Child was to be found, and in which they would meet with information as to the place where He was to be sought. Yet notwithstanding the chill which must have fallen on their enthusiasm when they found that no one in Jerusalem was taking any interest in the matter, they move on in their quest with as much unconcern and indifference to human respect as if they had been angels rather than men. It is impossible to doubt that their interior graces must have been very magnificent indeed. It is the way of God to give very largely in such cases. These men were His favourites, chosen for a great act of homage and honour to His Son, and He saw in

them the whole of the Gentile world, on which He was about to pour out the choicest treasures of His grace.

These thoughts prepare the mind for very large and noble conceptions as to the amount of interior intelligence which was communicated to these blessed Sages. We have already mentioned the gifts made by them to our Lord as being commonly understood to represent points concerning Him on which their faith had fastened. They believed Him to be God, as is shown by the frankincense, they honoured Him as the promised King, by their offering of the gold, and they also knew the truth that He was the Redeemer Who was to die for man, as is shown by the myrrh. But these few words express a very complete and deep faith indeed, a grasp of the whole Divine plan of the Incarnation which is not surpassed even in the Canticles of Zachary or of Simeon. And we must add, in our considerations concerning the magnificent faith of these strangers, the ease with which they seem to have put aside the trial, or what might have been to others the trial, both of the incredulity of the Jews themselves and of the poor and mean condition in which they found the Saviour of the world, the King Whom they had come so far to honour.

There is one aspect under which the presence of these Sages to pay homage to our Lord may be viewed, in reference to a form of devotion which is very dear to some Catholic hearts. The Eastern Princes are the first Christian pilgrims, and we naturally use the word as belonging to them. They did not come, as so many went up to the Temple,

for the sake of receiving the blessings connected with some retreat or sacrificial observance, but for simple satisfaction of their devotion. Thus, so early in the history of our Lord's Life, we find this principle, as it were, introduced and sanctioned by Him. The Epiphany thus opens the long series of pilgrimages of devotion, visits to holy places, the scenes of our Lord's Passion in the first instance, and then the resting-places of the Saints, or the scenes of marvellous apparitions of our Blessed Lady, her Holy House, and a thousand other such spots. It would seem as if this kind of pious exercise, which involves, in many cases, long and laborious journeys, and much mortification and suffering, was very dear to our Lord, and it has always been made the occasion of many graces, interior and exterior. The shrines to which pilgrimages are or were made were scattered, in the Christian ages, all over Europe, and the lives of many of the saints contain the records of their own love for this exercise of piety. It would be a mistake to think, however, that the true pilgrim spirit, and the graces which are so often won from God and His saints, are only to be found in the case of very long and distant journeys. In the past Catholic days, a land like our own was studded with places of pilgrimages, holy wells, pictures of our Blessed Lady, as well as shrines where the bodies of the saints reposed. Thus pilgrimages were always at hand, so to say, and Christians might practise them and gain great spiritual or temporal favours without spending any long time upon them. It would be a beautiful revival of the ancient spirit if, in this simple way, the practice were revived. No Catholic

Church now is without its statue or picture of our Blessed Lady, and the Stations of the Cross, and the devotion could be practised in this way without crossing the sea.

The holy Sages, indeed, were pilgrims in a higher sense, for they came to visit, not a shrine or the tomb of a saint, but our Lord Himself. Their devotion was the foundation of that of thousands of devout persons who make a visit to the Blessed Sacrament a part of the daily order of their life. Thus their aid may be invoked to obtain the dispositions, the ardent faith and hope and charity, with which such visits should be made. Nor can it be doubted that a habit like this, which has become so ingrained in Christian life in these last centuries, must have existed from the very beginning, although we can find so few traces of it in actual history. "Wherever the Body is," as our Lord said, "there will the eagles be gathered together." The eagles would not be eagles if they were not drawn by the most powerful of instincts to their food, wherever it lies. And Christians would not be Christians if still more powerful instincts did not move them to come and pour out their hearts in adoration, thanksgiving, and prayer, before the silent majesty of our Lord in the Sacred Tabernacle.

It is easy, therefore, to think that these Sages were admitted to very high spiritual favours indeed. The Child Whom they venerated in the arms of Mary was a child in age, but not in understanding, in the perfect use and exercise of all the faculties of mind and heart, and though, perhaps, He did not speak, in order not to break through the rule He had laid down for Himself, they must have under-

stood that His mere look read their hearts, and not only read them, but enlightened them, instructed them, blessed them with an immense increase of spiritual graces. They went back, not only His worshippers, but His scholars and His disciples. In this connection we may see the Divine fitness of every circumstance of the Epiphany. It was well that the Sages should find our Lord in all the poverty and dependence and obscurity and humiliation which characterized the condition of the Holy Family. He had chosen all these circumstances, as has been said, and He made them the lesson that He read to mankind at this time of His Life, when He did not teach or instruct externally in any other manner. If the offerings of the Sages show the perfection and completeness of their creed, we cannot doubt also that they drank in from the silent teaching of that Divine Child, as His eyes fell upon them, the lessons about the value of earthly goods, about the true riches, the true honour, the true greatness in the sight of Heaven which were embodied in every particular of His condition. Our Lord intended them in after years to be great preachers of His Gospel, and the Beatitudes, on which so much of the Gospel is founded, looked out upon them in most eloquent teaching as they worshipped Him on Mary's knee.

It is not easy to think that they left that school of perfection without being adequately instructed in all its principles. Our Lord did not summon them to His feet merely to pay Him homage, and receive in return no treasure of spiritual wisdom. We do not know that they ever met Him again, though

this is not impossible. But they must have been furnished by their short audience, so to speak, with all the Divine lore which was necessary as the foundation of their future eminence in His Kingdom. It is impossible to measure in words the rapturous joy with which they must have gazed on their Divine Teacher, as, moment after moment, the spiritual instruction and blessings which flowed in upon them mounted higher and higher. It was good for them to be there. "Let them make three tabernacles, for Jesus one, for Mary one, for Joseph one." Their hearts must have poured themselves out in gladness, and to whom could they speak of what they felt, to whom could they tell all the story of the star, and the inward inspirations which accompanied it, and their journey, and their reception at Jerusalem, and how it came about that they had found their way safely at last, under the guidance of their own star, save to that gracious Mother and her modest silent Spouse? Mary and Joseph could have had few, if they had any, friends at Bethlehem to whom they could speak of all the history of God's dealings with them since the Incarnation. These holy strangers were the first, perhaps, to whom the whole tale was told. The joy which is mentioned as the characteristic trait in the Sages, must have communicated itself, and been reflected in the calm, deep, unutterable exultation and thankfulness of the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph. Far into the night, perhaps, that happy exchange of thoughts concerning the goodness and the "great things" of God may have lasted, and if St. Scholastica could not bear to cease from such conversation with her holy brother, it

must have been with some sorrow that the blessed Sages parted for the night from that most blessed audience.

We must also dwell for a moment on the rejoicing of the Heart of our Lord Himself. In later days He rejoiced and gave thanks to His Father, as we are told by the Evangelists, because the secrets of the Kingdom had been hidden from the wise and prudent of the world, and had been revealed unto little ones. The Wise Strangers had knelt before Him, and on them He had shed many loving looks and poured out the tenderest affections of His Heart, though His condition as an Infant forbade Him from actually speaking to them except interiorly. He had seen in them, as we have said, the first-fruits and promise of a long line of saints, of triumphs and glories for His Church which were to have no parallel in her history, He had seen in them, moreover, the simplicity, the gentleness, the docility, the fearless confidence and openness which make up the beauties of the childlike character, and thus they were little ones in His sight, though wise and prudent in the truest sense, wiser and more prudent than all that Jerusalem contained of learning and wisdom, wiser and more prudent than all the statecraft and subtle policy of the wicked King and his counsellors. So their presence had been an occasion to Him of intense joy, and of great thanksgiving to His Father, to Whom He may have given His thanks in interior words like those which He used afterwards, "Even so, Father, for so it hath seemed good in Thy sight." And we should fail to exercise our intelligence rightly in the contemplation

of these mysteries of the Holy Infancy, both before and after the Nativity, if we did not continually remind ourselves of the fulness and perfect maturity of all the mental faculties of the Sacred Humanity, and that our Lord was as perfectly alive to all that passed before and around Him in the Providence of His Father, the places, the incidents, the persons, their thoughts and words and interior dispositions, as He was afterwards when He went among men as a Man like themselves to preach and to teach.

CHAPTER XI.

PERSECUTION.

St. Matt. ii. 12, 14; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, §§ 12, 13.

THE honour which the Providence of God had arranged that our Lord should receive in His cradle from the Wise Princes, was in its kind, as has been said, greater than any which had before been paid to Him by the world. The hearts of our Blessed Lady and St. Joseph must have been filled with the purest joy at the simple faith of these worshippers from a distance, at the significant gifts which they had offered, at the thought of the glorious prophecies which seemed already partly fulfilled by them, and at the still more glorious fulfilment in the future which their presence seemed to promise. But Mary had already learned to expect the Cross, and it had already stamped its mark, more or less deeply, on each of these successive mysteries of the Holy Infancy. She might, therefore, well anticipate that a shadow would soon fall on the brightness of the Epiphany. There had been suffering at the Nativity, there had been suffering when the sweet and blessed Name of Jesus had been given, there had been the prophecy of Simeon following close on the joy of the Purification. Perhaps Mary hardly anticipated the

swiftness with which the change would come after the Epiphany. The Sacred Heart, however, would know it all, and see the marvellous counsel of God in the persecution which was now to follow, and which was to be the type of the future treatment of Himself and His Church by the world, as well as of the dealings of God both with His friends and with His enemies.

The mysteries of the Holy Infancy appear at first sight accidental and strange. The persecution of which we are now to speak appears unnatural, the freak of an angry and inhuman tyrant. It appears also strange that God did not defend the safety of His Son by armies of angels, as He might well have done. He might have allowed Herod to seize the Blessed Child and His Mother, and then have delivered them out of his hands by a miracle. He might have struck down Herod before the persecution, as He did strike him down very soon after it. He might have provided for the Holy Family a secure asylum, without sending them so suddenly on a long and wearisome pilgrimage to another land, among a nation of idolaters. Much more might He have spared the innocent victims of the fury of the King, who suffered instead of our Lord, Who came upon earth to suffer for the whole world. Why were the mothers of Bethlehem to have their homes drowned in blood? Was there no exterminating angel to destroy the band of soldiers sent on that murderous mission, as the armies of Sennacherib had been destroyed in the days of Ezechias?

The history of the Holy Infancy is marvellously arranged by the Divine Wisdom for its own purposes.

Among these we may safely number the intention of God, that the Life of His Son on earth should be a complete prophecy and anticipation of what was to be afterwards the rule of His Providential arrangement for His Church, in order, among other things, that she might derive consolation, instruction, and strength from what she reads of and commemorates as the mysteries of His Life. Let us pause, therefore, before continuing the narrative of this particular persecution, to consider the principle itself by which God in His Providence allows what seems so great an evil, an evil which gives occasion to so much scandal and suffering, an evil which seems to be an insult to His Kingdom, and a very great injury to His children and His Church.

The circumstances under which our Lord had been born into the world contained the lesson that He was not to be exempted from the sufferings common to infants of tender age, from exposure to the inclemencies of weather, hard and spare lodging, and the like. They showed that He delighted in poverty, humiliation, and mortification. Later on the Circumcision, and the subsequent mysteries in the Temple, had made it manifest that He would take His place with other infants in the observance even of the more painful prescriptions of the Law, that His Blessed and Immaculate Mother was to be subjected to the law of purification, and at the same time opportunity would be given for the prophecy of Simeon, concerning the future contradictions and opposition to which He was to be exposed. We may see that something would have been wanting in the short history of the Infancy of our Lord, if it

had not included in it this lesson of the arrangement of God by which He was subjected to persecution, even while a Child in the arms of Mary.

The discipline of persecution was to fill a very large and very essential part in the dealings of God with His Church, and it was therefore seemly that this discipline should have its consecration, as it were, in the early years of Jesus Christ. It was indeed to have its part in His Public Life, and especially in the bringing about of His Death and Passion. But there are many degrees and modes of persecution, and all of these could not, it seems, be so well included in the short period of His active ministry, which could not be interrupted altogether for any length of time, without a derangement of the appointed order of the Providence of His Father. Thus it seems to be, that between the first period of the Infancy, which includes the mysteries of His Birth, Circumcision, and Presentation in the Temple, and the Hidden Life, properly so called, at Nazareth, which was to end with the beginning of His Public Life with His Baptism by St. John, there should be this interval of the persecution of Herod and the flight into Egypt, which contains many precious examples and instructions, which are not so prominently set before us in other periods of His sojourn upon earth. This seems to be, in general, the Divine reason underlying the period on which we are now about to enter, which is recorded for us by the first Evangelist only, who sees in every single incident of it some Divine fulfilment of what had been already divinely predicted. It had been predicted because

so it was to be, and it came about in the Providence of God because it had been predicted.

We may consider this Divine ordinance of persecution, if we may so speak of what is permitted rather than originally decreed by God, under many various aspects, and we shall find that each one of these has its place in the history of this particular persecution of our Lord and of others for His sake. In the first place, we have already said that God does not interfere to prevent persecution. He lets the malice of men have its own way in a great measure, in this as in so many other matters, though all the time He keeps the measure to which it is to be permitted to go in His own hands, and uses the fury and perversity of the persecutors for His own purposes. Of all persecutors it may be said, as the Apostles said of the various classes of persons who had conspired together against our Lord in the Passion, Herod and Pontius Pilate with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, "that they were to do what Thy hand and Thy counsels decreed to be done."[1]

We see that God makes it a rule not to interfere violently with these outbreaks of diabolical fury on the part of His enemies, preferring to bring good out of their evil, rather than to use His unquestioned and irresistible power in order that their evil may not be. He allows therefore the greatest injustice, the most outrageous cruelty, the basest treachery. He allows the most innocent to suffer, He permits all the various developments of social proscription and legal tyranny, war and persecution in the house-

[1] Acts iv. 27, 28.

hold, the master tyrannizing over the poor servant, the lord over the vassal. He permits the persecution of slander as well as the violence of the sword, the scathing fire of ridicule and public contempt, as well as the tortures of the rack or the wheel. All these forms of persecution are the abuse of things in themselves belonging to the lawful order of society and the world, and everything of which this is true is respected by God, Who has put His Church and His truth into the world and into society as a boat is committed to make its way over the waves of the sea. As He does not exempt His children from the ordinary sufferings which are the result of disease, or hunger, or weariness, and the like, so He does not exempt them from the sufferings which come from the perverse use made, by men like themselves, of the arrangements of human society and the divinely constituted power of law and of the state.

Another feature in the history of persecutions may next be mentioned. There is usually about them something which seems to breathe a more human malice. When our Lord allowed Himself to be put into bonds by His enemies in the Garden, He said to them, "This is your hour and the power of darkness." We cannot read the story of the Passion without being struck with the manner in which the enemies of God and man were allowed to wreak their hatred of both on our Blessed Lord. There were inventions of malignity in the Passion which transcended the malice of men. So it is very often indeed in the persecutions of the Church and of the servants of God. For persecution is in itself

a prime triumph of the enemy. It is turning what God has devised for the good of mankind, against Himself. It is using human power and authority, which come from Him, against His message of peace and reconciliation to mankind. Those who lend themselves to so malignant a rebellion against the goodness of God are instruments of Satan in the first instance, and deserve to be handed over by God to the will of the master whom they have chosen to serve. Hatred of God and of His truth is at the bottom of all their measures, though they are so often cunningly disguised under the appearance of a vindication of the law and of the rights of the State. Like the heresiarchs and authors of schism, the persecutors seem almost beside themselves. The Protestant persecutors of the seventeenth century are not in many cases to be charged with the invention of the punishments which they used, for they did not in truth invent them. They only applied, in a most savage and barbarous way, the legal punishments of earlier times. But the method and manner of the application was their own. In the same way the tortures of Japan and of China probably went far beyond the ordinary severities, even of those barbarous governments. So also it may be said of the savage tortures inflicted by the Indians of North America on the missionaries. It must have been the same with the tortures of the Christian martyrs under the Roman Empire. Many of them seem to have been devised for the occasion with a refinement of ingenuity hardly human. To estimate rightly the history of any persecution, this diabolical element must be

taken into due consideration. It is not always preterhuman cruelty. It is often preterhuman cunning, the subtlety of a most refined and ingenious policy against the truth.

Another feature in the system of Providence to which persecution belongs is the great apparent success which is sometimes allowed to it. History is indeed full of noble examples of resistance to and endurance under persecution. But it must be remembered that for one such instance that strikes the eye in the history of a period of this kind, there are many others which do not come to the surface, in which the will of the persecutor has had its way, either partially or entirely. After many even of the earlier persecutions there were whole multitudes of those who had lapsed, seeking for the pardon of the Church. To these must be added the vast numbers who did not seek reconciliation after their fall. Moreover, there must have been multitudes of children deprived of Baptism, or of Christian education, swept away by the storm of persecution into the depravities of heathenism, and prevented by a life of sin from returning to the Church, even if they were not altogether heathenized in mind and heart. The young of the flock are the first to suffer when the Churches must be closed and the priests banished. A persecution that lasts on from generation to generation is seldom unsuccessful. Even where the faith survives, there are often lax opinions and false doctrines.

There is another most terrible effect of persecution which cannot be omitted in this estimate of its character. It is constantly carried on in the

name of law and authority, and its tendency is to make the population exposed to it, bad citizens and subjects of the State which treats them so hardly. We have in our own history an instance of this in the famous Powder Plot. The Catholics were goaded to extremity, and their hopes were continually disappointed, time after time. At last some of them turned on their persecutors with a plot to get rid of them all by one act of wholesale assassination. People under such circumstances are apt to forget the doctrine of St. Paul that the powers that be are ordained by God, and if they do not openly break the Divine law by treasonable outbreaks or conspiracies, they hand on to their children a legacy of hatred and rebelliousness, which serves the purpose of the enemies of their souls quite as well as if they had yielded to the temptation to apostatize from the faith. It matters little to the devils whether they persuade a man to break the law of charity or of justice, or to give up his Faith, to violate the fourth commandment or to violate the sixth. Thus, wherever this feeling of hatred and revengefulness exists, it must be considered as an evidence of the success of persecution. Thus Catholic populations are sometimes induced to conceive and nourish and hand on, from generation to generation, the most malignant national antipathies, which vent themselves in the secret wars of assassination and destructive plots, and which make whole masses of the people the easy dupes of political agitators, the enemies alike of religion, morality, and social order. Instead of praying for their oppressors, or for the children of their oppressors, for these

last have long ago gone to their account, they return evil for evil. Thus they do to their own souls a far greater injury than any that external persecution has inflicted on their forefathers.

Another thing that may be remarked upon in this subject is that, although God does not abandon His children, but frequently protects them in marvellous ways, still He leaves them to take the ordinary means for saving themselves from the fury of the storm aroused against them. They have to fly from their homes, they have to hide themselves, they are liable to all the chances of detection and all the dangers of betrayal. He might certainly have saved our Lord and His Blessed Mother otherwise than by the sudden flight into Egypt, which must have cost them so much suffering and St. Joseph so much anxiety, lest his guardianship might fail to protect them. But He chose this means rather than any other, and He chose it probably for the very reason that flight was to be so often the only resource in the case of thousands of His faithful in succeeding ages, and because He designed to make flight before persecution a kind of law in His Church, and to use it very frequently indeed as the method by which the truth, persecuted in one place, made its home in another, and thus propagated itself while it seemed to be on the point of extinction.

There is yet another point which must be noticed with regard to the permission of persecutions by Divine Providence. This is, that they frequently come as chastisements and for the purpose of purification. It can generally be found that the churches

on which they fall have much need of such discipline, that faith has waxed dull and charity cold, that there have been abuses in high places, that the clergy have been given to the indolent enjoyment of their temporal and social position, and the like. Thus it is remarkable that the brunt of the suffering of this the first persecution should fall on the people of Bethlehem, who had just distinguished themselves so miserably by their want of hospitality to our Lady and St. Joseph. At the same time the chastisement was one of great mercy, on account of the immense spiritual benefits bestowed upon the blessed infants whose lives were sacrificed in the massacre. If the Bethlehemites themselves were not made better by the persecution, at least their children became the first of the Christian martyrs, and acquired as such great power in their intercessions for their parents and others of the place. Thus what was sent as a chastisement became a blessing, and the weeping mothers, if they had but had full faith, might have rejoiced over the dispensation of Providence for their children's good, instead of bewailing it as a cruel affliction and an irreparable loss.

It was this discipline of persecution which was now to have its consecration in the life of our Lord while yet a Child in the arms of His Mother, in order that it might be endowed, for all generations of the Church, with that salutary power of healing which cannot but be attached to anything which He has touched or which has touched Him. If we pass on to the divine end of the glory of God which is in view in every such dispensation, we shall see at once

the immense increase of glory which would follow from this persecution, falling in intention and in act on the Holy Family itself, and passing on from them, by the arrangement of Providence, to the innocent children of the same age with our Lord, whose lives were forfeited because they, so far, bore His character and belonged to and represented Him in the eyes of the persecutor. The flight into Egypt gave occasion for the exercise of the highest virtues on the part of our Lord, His Mother, and St. Joseph. This new decree of God was accepted and executed with the fullest and most perfect promptitude of obedience, with joy and thanksgiving, and the greatest patience in the acceptance of all the inconveniences, dangers, and humiliations to which they were in consequence exposed.

It was now in the Life of our Lord that He and His Mother took up those minor hardships of daily recurrence, all the suffering that is contained in rapid change of abode, in the fatigue and destitution of long journeys, for which no provision can be made, in the fear of pursuit and the constant alarms of such a time, in exposure to the weather, in going among utter strangers, without friends or means of sustenance, in a long stay in a country the inhabitants of which were aliens in language and religion, idolaters, people of bad and immoral fashions and ways of life, altogether unlikely to show hospitality or kindness of any kind to their unknown guests. The time for the great heroic sufferings of Calvary was not yet to be, there was not yet shedding of His Blood, the scourges, the crown of thorns, or the Cross. All that was as yet in the future. But now

He took to Himself those other far more ordinary and frequent elements of mortification which, because they are so ordinary and so frequent, make up so large a part of the discipline of the souls who are the dearest to Him on earth. For one occasion of heroic suffering we have a thousand of suffering in this lesser and more common kind, and thus this method of sanctification is perhaps more fruitful of glory to Him than any other that can be named. It is therefore a part of His careful thoughtfulness for us that has made Him give us this and other similar features in His own Life to look to under this sort of infliction. The daily life led by Mary and Joseph as well as our Lord during the flight and sojourn in Egypt was infinitely pleasing to God, as constant exercise of the most glorious virtues, patience, humility, joyfulness under privation, hope and confidence in Providence, poverty, charity, gentleness, meekness, and the loftiest prayer and interior union with Him. It is not wonderful that the old Fathers thought, when in after years the land of our Lord's exile became so famous over the whole Church as the abode of thousands of saints, who have left behind them an imperishable memory as the founders and first teachers of the ascetic life, that the fruitfulness of the deserts and caves of Egypt was to be attributed to the consecration of the land which it had received by the sojourn of the Holy Family.

We see, then, that in this sense the exile in Egypt lives on in the Church, as the residence at Nazareth for the long years of the Hidden Life lives on also. This again is one of the ordinary rules of Providence

in regard of persecution. The exiles who are driven from their homes into a strange and distant land carry with them the blessing of God, especially if they are received with kindness and hospitality. God makes those who belong to Him strangers and pilgrims, for their own discipline and greater perfection. But those who receive them, as for instance the English nation in the time of the great French Revolution, who welcomed the emigrants from France with so much kindness, profit by the example of their virtues and the power of their prayers. Thus it is a common thought with those who rejoice in the revival of Catholicism in this country in our own day, that it is owing in part to the reception of the strangers at that time. Nor is it ever likely that a family exercises hospitality of this kind, without receiving an abundant reward in this life, and in the next.

Before we conclude this general consideration of the mystery which we are to dwell on presently more in detail, we must notice one other feature of this providential dispensation, which has frequent and constant illustrations throughout the whole history of the Church. Even under the Roman Empire it began to be noticed as a principle of history, that the persecutors of Christians came usually to a bad and appalling end. The reason has often been given, that such persons lift up their hands against the messengers and children of God in the execution of their great commission for the reconciliation of the world to Himself through Jesus Christ. Therefore they have placed themselves, beyond other sinners and rebels against Him in the

world, in direct opposition to the work which He is doing for salvation, a work which He specially directs and specially protects. With many forms of evil and rebellion God forbears and dissembles, seeming not to notice what He has the whole of eternity to punish in. But it is not for the honour of His work, nor would it conduce to a right estimate of the importance which He attaches thereto, if men who put themselves in the position of direct antagonists to God, like Pharao and Herod, should be allowed to die like other men, and end their days in peace. Thus it is, as has been said, a constant fact in history that persecutors are cut off in some sudden and painful and startling manner. They do not always lose their power or position, though this is often the case, as was the case in our own century with the first Napoleon, and also with his nephew. But their death has most often this character about it, it is either loathsome, or sudden, or violent, or premature, marked, even to the outward eye, by some circumstance which recalls to the mind the part they have taken against God and His Church, the Holy See, or the Vicar of our Lord. They are used by God for His own Divine purposes, but they are soon swept away in some manner which marks them as the victims of a peculiar Providence in the punishment of His enemies.

In the history of the flight into Egypt and the massacre of the innocents we shall have to observe the fulfilment of many of these conditions, which belong to the general rule of God's dispensation of persecution. It is this which gives a peculiar character and importance to this period of the Holy

Infancy, and which separates it off from the former mysteries of the Nativity and the Purification, as well as from the later time of the tranquil Hidden Life in the holy house at Nazareth. Thus, if this period had been left out, we should have been without a considerable portion of the light which may be derived from the personal history of our Blessed Lord for the intelligence of the ways of God in His Providence over the Church. Our Lord's example at this time, as also the example of His Blessed Mother and of St. Joseph, is full of practical instruction for the personal guidance of His children. He is as much our Teacher in the flight and exile, as in the womb of Mary, the cradle at Bethlehem, or in the Holy House. Each one of these stages of His earthly existence had its place in His Life for our sakes, and each one of them has its peculiar lesson. We are now to endeavour to draw out more in detail the especial teachings which belong to the period, whether short or long, we are not quite certain, which is comprised between His flight and His return.

CHAPTER XII.

THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT.

St. Matt. ii. 12—15; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 14.

We left the Wise Princes after their interview with our Lady and their worship of our Blessed Lord, to rest from their long journey now happily accomplished. They probably intended to return almost immediately to Jerusalem, where Herod was awaiting them. He designed apparently to put them to death or do them some violence, and also to send at once to destroy in His cradle the Holy Child Whom they had come so far to seek. Joseph and Mary slept in peace after having dismissed the strangers with many gracious words of comfort and gratitude. Their hearts were full of the joy of this new manifestation of the greatness of the Child, and of the care taken by His Father over those who desired to do Him honour.

We are first told of the warning given to the Wise Princes, after they had retired to rest. "Having received an answer in sleep that they should not return to Herod, they went back another way into their own country." It has seemed to some devout persons that there was thus a kind of progress and advance in the manner in which God communicated

His designs to these holy Sages. They are first taught by the star, then by the Jewish Church, and finally by a personal communication from God. The first step is in the order of nature, that is, the physical universe which was the great book out of which those ancient generations were to learn concerning God, was used by Him to start the Sages on their way. The star would have been of little use to them but for the ancient prophecies which spoke of its appearance and signification, but these two combined made up the complete instruction which they required at that early stage of their history. When they arrive at Jerusalem, they are within the sphere of the light which was stored up in the chosen people of God, and it is by means of the Synagogue that they are instructed as to the further prophecy which was the inheritance of the Jews alone. It is something higher to learn from the Church, which is the depositary of revealed truth, than from the star or from ancient tradition. Then finally they are dealt with personally, and in the manner which God uses for the guidance of His servants and friends as to individual matters of conduct. There is something more familiar about this, and it seems to be a higher favour to have a special Divine communication than to learn simply general truths from the mouth of the Church or the Synagogue. The communication thus made was with reference to their individual guidance, and could hardly have been made in any other way.

We cannot doubt that these holy servants of God made continual advances in perfection, in knowledge of His ways, and in intimacy with Him. A com-

munication made by means of a dream shows that God can depend on the fidelity and docility of the person to whom it is made. We may perhaps gather also that these holy men were men of pure and simple hearts, their thoughts well ordered, and their minds undefiled by the images of the world. God uses dreams for the instruction of St. Joseph all through. A dream is sometimes used by Him when there are more persons than one concerned, as the recipients of some Divine commission, for when the same vision is repeated to different persons it is at once seen to be a supernatural communication, and not an individual fancy. Such was the dream by means of which, as we are told, the devout pair who were the first builders and founders of the beautiful Church of St. Mary Major at Rome, were informed of the will of God concerning that foundation. Such also the dream of the three to whom the foundation of the Order of Our Lady of Ransom is owing. St. Peter Nolasco, St. Raymond de Pennafort, and James the King of Aragon. Thus if the Sage Princes had each the same dream, and told it one to another when they awoke, it would be enough to make them perfectly certain of the will of God, and they would obey it at once.

The old Christian artists have accustomed us to see them represented as having with them a large company of attendants, but this circumstance is of no historical certainty. A few companions would have been enough to attract the attention which they received when they arrived at Jerusalem. In any case, the day would not have grown old, many hours would not have passed, before they were far on their way

from Bethlehem, bending their course perhaps to the passage of the Jordan beyond Jericho, along a road by which they would soon be beyond the reach of the pursuit of Herod, if he thought it worth his while to order their pursuit. Very soon after the Wise Princes themselves left their quarters at Bethlehem, the Holy Family was also on its way towards the south. They must have trusted rather to the simplicity and insignificance of their appearance, and to the special guardianship of God, than to any great speed in their movements to escape the vigilance of the King and his officials. "And when they [the Wise Princes] were departed, behold an Angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph, saying, Arise, and take the Child and His Mother and flee into Egypt, and be there until I shall tell thee. For it will come to pass that Herod will seek the Child to destroy Him. Who, rising up, took the Child and His Mother by night and retired into Egypt, and he was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the Prophet saying, Out of Egypt have I called My Son."

The Christian writers find many divine reasons for this injunction, by which the land of Egypt was selected as the place of refuge for our Lord and His Blessed Mother at this time. Egypt was a safe place, both because the Holy Family must very soon have been lost to sight in the multitudes of its population, and because it was under a government of its own, depending directly on Rome, and no machinations of Herod could reach them there. Historically it was more connected with the chosen people

than any other country in the world. It had been the place of refuge for Abraham and Isaac in times of famine, it had been for centuries the home of the children of Israel, it was connected with the most marvellous part of their history, their persecution and servitude, and their miraculous deliverance, after so long a contest with the obstinacy of Pharao, by the hand of Moses, their great lawgiver. Even if it had not been distinctly prophecied, as we shall see, that our Lord should at one time be a sojourner there, it might be thought that a sort of natural and historical fitness required that so He should be, that He should fulfil in His own person the typical anticipations of His history which were so numerous in the connection with Egypt of so many who might be considered His representatives.

But it is a proof of what has been remarked, in a former part of this work, concerning the exclusively Gentile character of the early Christian traditions which have come down to us from the Apostolical age, that no mention should have been made, in connection with the flight into Egypt, of the certain fact that nowhere in the world, and certainly nowhere in the neighbourhood of Palestine, were there so large numbers of Jews living in communities recognized as almost independent by the government, with resources so large and organization so complete. It is said that about this time there were a million of Jews in Alexandria. They were conspicuous for their position, and very powerful, as well as highly respected by their neighbours. The traditions which have come down to us seem to fix the spot at which the Holy Family dwelt while

in Egypt as in the neighbourhood of Heliopolis in the Thebaid, and if this was so, they would have not have been far from the famous Temple of Leontopolis, an imitation of that at Jerusalem, which had long been a centre of worship for the large Jewish population of the country, probably encouraged by the Kings of the house of Ptolemy, for the sake of withdrawing their Jewish subjects from too close a dependence on Jerusalem. The manner in which the devout Jews of Palestine regarded this temple is not quite ascertained, as it may have been looked on with suspicion by some as a possible rival to the Temple of Jerusalem. But in any case the Holy Family, if they did not join in the worship of God in that Temple, would find in a large number of the towns and cities of the country the synagogues to which they had been accustomed in Judæa and Galilee.

Egypt was indeed a land given up to some most degrading and corrupted forms of idolatry, and its people were probably very low in the moral scale. But there seem to be sufficient grounds for the opinion that it contained a larger proportion of inhabitants of Jewish extraction very faithful to the law of their forefathers, than any other country in the world except Palestine. Our Lady and St. Joseph may have kept themselves in great retirement and obscurity, but it was not a country in which strangers from Palestine would not have found many of their own nation ready to help them. The Jews, in whatever foreign countries they may have had to settle themselves, have always been famous for their care for the poor of their own nationality, and we may hope that some

part of the great outpouring of graces which ensued in that country, when the Gospel came to be preached there, may have been a reward on the part of Providence for the hospitality exercised towards Mary, her husband, and her Child. Thus it may have been the design of Providence to use the anger of Herod, which was the immediate occasion of the Flight, as an opportunity, among other things, of preparing the hearts of many among the inhabitants of Egypt, whether they were Egyptians or Jews, for the Gospel graces, by leading them to exercise hospitality towards the Holy Family. There must have been something extremely attractive about our Lady and her Child, and the hearts that were won by her gentleness and modesty when she was in need of succour, must have found themselves afterwards wonderfully blessed for the aid they may have given, when the Kingdom of her Son came to be planted in their land. The Jews of Egypt were the nearest and most numerous representatives of that large mass of their nation which was living among the heathen, and our Lord was to have no other opportunity of blessing them by His presence.

The immediate command of God conveyed by the Angel required instant flight, and it was of course obeyed with the utmost promptitude. The travellers could not be altogether out of danger for some time after they had left Bethlehem. As long as they were within the borders of Judæa, the danger was imminent, at least if Herod had been but ordinarily prudent and alert in his measures. Their route lay right through a part of the Holy Land most immediately under his sway, and it must have

taken some time before they could reach the border. Nor would they be safe even then, for they did not pass at once into the settled country of Egypt, with its towns and villages, where they could naturally be shielded from violence. There was a part at least of the desert to be passed, in which they would be liable to all the sufferings of scarcity of food and the like, and would moreover be an easy prey to any band of armed pursuers who might be sent after them by the King. Their departure was made in the night. It is said by St. Matthew to have been made after the departure of the Wise Princes, which must have been in the morning after their dream concerning their own return. St. Joseph, therefore, must have had his own vision on the following night, and he probably lost not a moment in obeying the order of the Angel, so that the flight must have been begun that same night before the morning dawned. It was not a moment too soon.

It must have been known to Herod, by this time, that the Princes had departed by another route, and he would naturally take his own vindictive measures as soon as possible. Tyrants such as he do not long deliberate about massacres. Thus there would have been a danger at Bethlehem within a very few hours of the departure of the Holy Family. We are not told anything certain about the pursuit. It is hardly possible that Herod should not have heard of the flight. His emissaries would probably execute his orders for the massacre without waiting to inform him that the Child Whom the Princes had adored was no longer to be found. They may not even have known of the motive of the order given them.

If they had returned to tell him that his massacre would be useless, it might have cost them their own lives. We may well think, therefore, that there was some foundation in fact for the stories which have come down to us about the danger of the Holy Family from its pursuers, and the adventures which befell them on their way to the land of refuge. Some of these stories are in themselves more probable than others, but it cannot be said that they rest on any certain historical foundation. The best of them are stories likely to have been invented by Christians of pious imagination.

There are other traditions more venerable, since they come to us from the great names of some of the early Fathers, Origen, Eusebius, Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem. But they are founded on the words of one of the prophecies of Isaias, and so may have been accepted without further evidence. "Behold the Lord will ascend upon a swift cloud, and will enter into Egypt, and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at His presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst thereof."[1] These words of the prophet may well have given rise to the tradition of the falling down of the idols of Egypt, as the image of Dagon had fallen down when the Ark of the Covenant was placed in the same temple. We cannot be certain that the prophecy is not to be understood in a spiritual sense, and in that case its fulfilment would be certainly true, though the casting down of the idols may have been the destruction of their power over the hearts and minds of their former worshippers. It is a fact that meets us in

[1] Isaias xix. 1.

more than one place in the history of the early saints, that the idols, or rather the demons who used them for their own purposes of imposture, are said to have declared to their worshippers, or to the Emperors themselves, that they could give no oracular answers as long as this or that saint, a great preacher of the Gospel, was allowed to teach and make converts in the neighbourhood. The devils certainly hate nothing more than the presence of our Lord, which is a torture to them, and before which their power over men is shackled or destroyed, whether it be His Presence on the Christian altar in the Blessed Sacrament, in the teaching of the Church, or in the holy lives of His saints. In this way the presence of the Holy Family, our Lord, His Mother, and St. Joseph, must have made itself known, perhaps, to the devils who were worshipped under the idols of Egypt, and this may have been the true fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaias of which the Fathers are so fond of speaking in reference to this flight.

That there may have been some incident of the kind just mentioned may be very probable. That there was anything like a general overthrow of the idols can hardly be asserted without greater proof, for, as has been said, the language of the Fathers seems to be taken from a literal interpretation of the Prophet rather than from any certain tradition. Miracles of this kind may have taken place, but we do not meet with them in any authoritative record. They may even seem in some degree alien to the character of the history of the Holy Infancy, so full of all that is humble and obscure, rather than of

anything that shows power and aggression. But we have but a part of this great history, and it may have had other characteristics besides those which are presented to us in the Gospels. It is enough for us to think that our Lord's presence in the land which was afterwards so prolific in saints and doctors, and in which the ascetic life struck its first roots, was fruitful in those true prodigies of His power which are to last on in the glory of His saints in Heaven throughout all eternity.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE HOLY INNOCENTS.

St. Matt. ii. 16—18; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 13.

THE Evangelist relates shortly the whole history of the Flight into Egypt and the arrival of the Holy Family, before any mention of what passed at Bethlehem in the meantime. But long before St. Joseph could conduct his precious charge to a place of safety, the fury of Herod had let itself loose upon the little city in which our Lord had been born, and where He had received the homage of the Wise Princes. "Then Herod, perceiving that he was deluded by the Wise Men, was exceedingly angry, and sending killed all the men children that were in Bethlehem and in all the confines thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the Wise Men. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremias the Prophet saying, A voice was heard in Rama, lamentation and great mourning: Rachel bewailing her children, and would not be comforted because they are not."[1] We shall speak of this fulfilment of prophecy presently, together with the other similar fulfilments to which the Evangelist draws our attention in the whole of this account of the flight and return.

[1] Jer. xxxi. 15.

Herod was already deeply stained with blood, and among his victims were reckoned his own favourite wife Mariamne, some of his own sons and nearest relations. He was essentially a man of blood, and spared no one on whom his suspicion fell. This particular massacre is not mentioned by the Jewish historian Josephus, but the authority of the Evangelist is enough to establish its historical character. The number of the children who were thus sacrificed to the anger of the King cannot be certainly known. Bethlehem was not a large city, but the Sacred Text mentions its confines as having also been the scene of the carnage. Thus the number of the children slain might amount to a hundred or two, and the massacre must have left a deep mark in the memories of the people. There was no care taken to select the victims, beyond the general order as to the age, the reason for which has already been spoken of. The soldiers probably went from house to house seizing the infants as they came on them, and they may have slaughtered many who were not strictly within the appointed limit. The cruel work would not take very long, and Bethlehem was soon left with its streets flowing with blood. The King would be told that his behests had been fully accomplished, and would turn himself without further thought to fresh schemes of cruelty and murder. The appetite for shedding blood grows rapidly on such monsters, and indeed on all men who let themselves once be led into so miserable a course, as we see in such histories as that of the great French Revolution, or of many modern wars. We shall speak presently of the death of this cruel King, and see how he was pre-

paring fresh murders even to the last hours of his life.

The streets of Bethlehem were flowing with blood, and the wailings of the bereaved mothers filled the air. There may have been some among them who understood the intention of the wicked King, and who may have complained bitterly that the Child of the strange Mother from Nazareth, Who had so lately been seen among them, should have been allowed by Providence to bring so much evil on their homes. Even among Christians the thought will sometimes rise up, why was it that while our Lord was shielded by flight, no protection was extended, no warning was sent to the mothers of Bethlehem and their children? Thus we need the beautiful revelation of the ways and counsels of God which is made to us by the liturgies of the Catholic Church to console us at the sight of this terrible slaughter. The instinct of the Church has regarded these infants as among the most blessed of the human race. She venerates them on her altars, and makes them her intercessors, attributing to them a very high place indeed in the Kingdom of Him in Whose name they were sacrificed. Thus she teaches us that it was no weakness on the part of Providence, as if God was unable to defend these children as well as our Lord Himself, that brought about or permitted this massacre, but that it was by a great act of the most lavish bountifulness of God that the Holy Innocents were raised to their great dignity and blessedness by the sword which was wielded by the emissaries of the King. Thus the massacre of the Innocents takes its place among the great mysteries of the Holy Infancy, and

conduces greatly to the glory of God and to our intelligence of His ways, especially in the Dispensation of the Incarnation, like the Purification of our Lady, and like the Epiphany itself.

The Church applies to these blessed infants the famous passage in the Apocalypse of St. John about the hundred and forty-four thousand who keep the Lamb company as He stands upon Mount Sion. "And I beheld, and lo! a Lamb stood upon Mount Sion, and with Him a hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Name and the Name of His Father written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from Heaven, as the voice of many waters and as the voice of great thunder, and the voice which I heard was as the voice of harpers harping upon their harps. And they sang as it were a new canticle before the throne, and before the four living creatures, and the ancients, and no man could say the canticle, but those hundred and forty-four thousand who were purchased from the earth. These are they who were not defiled with women: for they are virgins. These follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. These were purchased from among men, the first-fruits to God and to the Lamb: and in their mouth there was found no lie: for they are without spot before the throne of God."[2] These Divine words apply to others of the saints of God besides the Holy Innocents, but they apply to them in the mind of the Church, and some of the expressions in the passage, especially that by which they are said to be the first-fruits to God and the Lamb, have a peculiar meaning in regard to these children. They are spoken of as

[2] Apoc. xiv. 1—5.

virgins, and it is implied that they are martyrs. They sing a song of their own which none but themselves can sing, and they follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth, by which words it seems to be implied that they have a very large share of His power. This is the feeling and the doctrine of the Church concerning them, and we may spend a short time in dwelling upon this truth and seeking to explain it to ourselves.

To human eyes there was nothing about the death of these Innocents to raise them to the pre-eminence which is thus attributed to them. Our common ideas of martyrdom make it a willing and conscious sacrifice, and there is nothing willing or conscious about the death of these children, at least to the outward eye. Nor, as far as we know, was there any faith on the part of their parents by which they might have been willing to allow the sacrifice. But they were certainly slain out of hatred to our Lord, and this at once gives them a title to some great recompence at His hands. They were in any case substituted for Him, their murder was ordered because, in the number of the victims, it was hoped that He would be included. The children were guilty of no crime at all, even in the eyes of Herod, but that of being His fellow-citizens, a band among whose ranks He was one. These considerations may prepare us for finding that our Lord would not permit these innocent children to lose by the hatred for Him which brought about their premature death, and tore the hearts of so many mothers with anguish. We have in this mystery, therefore, as it comes to us, lighted up by the commentary which is furnished by the belief of the Church, a revelation of the greatness and magni-

ficence of God and of our Lord in dealing with those who even involuntarily suffer for Him and in His Name. The malice of Herod against them was in truth malice against our Lord Himself, and it would not harmonize with the extreme liberality of God in rewarding the slightest services, if the cruelty of the King were not far more than compensated for to these poor children by the goodness of Him Whose life was sought in every blow of the swords which took away their lives.

It is in this way that we may answer the difficulties which may be adduced against the faith of the Church with regard to the Holy Innocents. If we are to apply in their full meaning the magnificent words of such a passage as that lately quoted from the Apocalypse to these holy children, we should have to see in them, not simply involuntary martyrs for the cause of our Lord, but also virgins, inheriting the special aureole which belongs to those whose purity has been tested in conflict and danger, such as St. Agnes and St. Cecilia. They may claim also that perfect virtue which seems to be signified by their being without spot before the throne of God. It appears, in short, that these Innocents are treated as if they had had to fight out the fight of faith and of purity and of other virtues in the battlefield of the world, whereas all that we are actually told of them in Scripture is that they suffered involuntarily in their infancy. These are difficulties which it is worth while to answer to ourselves, because their answer opens to us a new region of the goodness and the greatness of God in the Kingdom of His grace.

There is one answer which is made by some theologians in this case which peremptorily cuts at the root of the objection, at least in great part. For it is thought by some, and there is no reason at all why it should not be so, that the Holy Innocents were wonderfully enlightened and sanctified in the few moments before their blessed death, and by that means were enabled to pass from the state of involuntary and unconscious sufferers for the sake of our Lord, to that of martyrs with full consciousness and intelligence and choice, so that their deaths became as much martyrdoms, in the ordinary sense of the word, as the deaths of St. Stephen or St. Lawrence. There is no reason at all why this should not have taken place. The same grace which upon the salutation of Mary woke up the soul of St. John Baptist into full consciousness, full understanding of the presence of our Lord and of His Mother, which then and there sanctified him, cleansed him from original sin, and filled him with the Holy Ghost, might easily have wrought a similar change in the souls of these holy children. They were very near to our Lord, and they had a special claim on His mercy and liberality. Why should He not have given to them the full use of their reason and free will, enlightening them at the same time as to the great truths of faith concerning God, Himself, and themselves? In this way they might have won their crowns by a single act of loyal faith and loving self-sacrifice, a single act which would live on for ever in the glories which it brought down upon them from Him.

There is nothing at all unreasonable in this sup-

position, because their position and their service to Him were both unique in their own kind. We are not astonished at the singular graces bestowed, in the first moment of her existence, upon the Blessed Mother of God, for this very reason, that her vocation and office had no parallel. It would have been matter for astonishment if she had not received the graces which, in the measure of the great magnificence of God in dealing with His Mother, were to be expected for making her fit for her great work. We may say the same of St. John Baptist, of St. Joseph, and others, such as the Apostles and first preachers of the Gospel, or St. Paul in particular, or the holy Evangelists. We expect in them the marvellous graces which correspond to their work for our Lord. The fury of Herod put these children in His place, it made their death a sacrifice for Him, it made them the heralds of His Truth to all who heard of their murder, it sent them into the world beyond the grave to proclaim that the promised King was born. It would have been strange if the munificence of our Lord had not exerted itself to outstrip the malice of His enemy, by turning their compulsory witness into a deliberate and meritorious martyrdom. That was the natural answer to be expected from our Lord to the cruelty of the impious King. He did not come, indeed, as Herod feared, to deprive him of the throne which he had usurped, but He did come to raise his involuntary victims to thrones brighter and more lasting than his.

If this theory be adopted as to the sanctification of the blessed Innocents in the moment of their death, the other words of the Apocalyptic vision are

easily explained of them. It is true that the beauty of their virginity was not of the same kind as that of St. Agnes or St. Cecilia, but it was not unlike the grace which we read of in the lives of some of the Saints, who have been preserved, by a special favour of God, from all the cravings and weaknesses of the flesh, so as not to know even an evil thought, or of others, again, whose lives had been so sheltered that they have passed through this world, the home of concupiscence, rather as ignorant of it than as confronting or as conquering it. All the saints in Heaven are, there, of full age, though no one can tell how many millions of them have died in their early infancy, and of all such it may be said, as of the Holy Innocents, "These are they that have not been defiled with women, for they are virgins, and they are without spot before the throne of God." That canticle which they sing, and which no one else can sing, does not require in those who sing it that they shall have known and conquered the movements of concupiscence. It is enough that they have been without them.

Another reason which may be given in support of the same opinion is the undeniable truth that God attaches immense importance and value to the first-fruits of anything that we give Him. This is the peculiar character of the sacrifice of the Innocents. It was the first offering of human life in witness to our Lord's royal dignity. It was the first tribute offered to God the Father by our Lord as the fruit of the Incarnation. It was the beginning of a long and endless line of heroic immolations bearing on them the stamp of the Cross, the fragrance

of the Precious Blood of the Son of God. In this light, we see how natural it is that this sacrifice of the holy children should have been ennobled, transfigured, glorified, steeped through and through with the new and most powerful grace of the Kingdom of the Incarnation. If, therefore, it were necessary, in order to account for the lofty position of these young Saints in the Church, their glory in Heaven as reflected in their honour upon earth, to think that there had been in their case some exercise of Divine Power in filling them with grace and intelligence before their lives were taken away, there would be no reason why this opinion should not be held.

At the same time it may be remarked that this would not be the only way in which their glory in Heaven might be explained. We are always inclined to set limits to the liberality and munificence of God, to seek, as it were, for reasons to justify Him in parts of His Providential government where He is free to act without any reason such as our poor minds can supply. Our Lord seems to touch on this weakness of our intelligence regarding Himself in the Parable of the Husbandman, where He represents His Father under the character of the bountiful Master, Who replies to complaints against His beneficence, "Is it not lawful for Me to do as I will?" The merits of our Lord are enough for the sanctification, in the highest degrees of sanctity, and for the glorification, in the highest degrees of glorification, of a thousand worlds. He may apply them as He likes. If He chooses to apply them freely to souls to whom He has a kind of obligation, so to say, not from any merit of their own, but from the ineffable largeness

of His own generosity and appreciation of what they have done for Him, He can do so as He wills and as much as He wills. When the Holy Innocents surrendered their lives for Him, whether it were voluntarily or involuntarily, He took from them, by virtue of His Supreme dominion over His creatures, what He had given them, as He was free to do. And His same Supreme dominion extends over all the riches of His grace and all the treasures and crowns of His Heavenly Kingdom, and as He can confer the crowns of martyrdom or any other dignities in that Kingdom where He has before given the merit, so He may confer the same even where there has not been merit because there has not been the exercise of free will. Many holy purposes of the glory of God may be served by such action on His part, as many such purposes are served by His action in imparting the crowns and aureolas of Heaven according to the usual laws which He follows in the distribution of His rewards. The Holy Innocents in the Providence of His Father did Him a certain service, and bore Him a certain witness, and He may choose to recompence these in a way of His own.

It may well seem, moreover, that this explanation of the glory of the Holy Innocents is highly probable, not only, as we have said, on account of the great value which God attaches to the first fruits, in any kind, that are offered to Him, but also on account of the very great magnificence in the distribution of graces which characterizes in particular the beginnings of the Kingdom of the Incarnation. The Kingdom of the Incarnation is the

choicest, most beautiful, most wonderful work of God. It is not to be marvelled at that He should decorate it most lavishly with the gifts of His love and of His power. One of those whom He cured in His later life said that if she could but touch the hem of His garment, she should be healed. Power went out from Him on every side, most especially affecting those who were the nearest to Him, who as it were touched Him and had to do with Him in the early stages of the Incarnation. The first and nearest to Him was His Mother, and she became at once the object of His tenderest love and His largest bounty. Though He poured out His graces so profusely on her, so lavishly that her gifts surpassed those of all other saints and of all angels taken together, He still had the most magnificent prodigality to shed upon those who came next, as St. Joseph, St. John Baptist, and His Apostles and Evangelists. We ought to be ready to believe anything however great as to the graces bestowed on all near Him, on St. Anne and St. Joachim, St. Zachary and St. Elisabeth, or the Holy Kings and Shepherds, Simeon and Anna, or Magdalene and her blessed companions in ministering to Him, and so of the rest. But it is to this hierarchy, so to say, of the Incarnation, that the Holy Innocents belong, and they are most close to Him in that hierarchy, because they suffer for Him, their blood and their lives are given for Him, and thus they remind Him of His own most cherished sacrifice of love before He Himself has time to make it.

It would not, indeed, be a surprise to any thoughtful Catholic, if the life of the Church, as it lasts on

age after age, should reveal more and more the special greatness of the saints who were gathered around Himself in "the days of His Flesh," as St. Paul speaks. It has taken centuries to bring out, in the divinely guided order of Christian devotion, the pre-eminence of the sanctity of St. Joseph himself, of St. Anne, and of others who belong so closely to our Lord or His Mother. There are still, in the glorious hierarchy of which we are speaking, saints who may stand forth more prominently than at present as objects of the general devotion of the faithful all over the world, individuals in the Apostolic band or among the holy women of the Gospels, the persons healed by Him or in other ways connected with the incidents of His Life and Passion, who are now, as it were, lost in the general splendour of the company to which they belong. Lazarus, Martha, Salome, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea, are but a few of many who might be named as shining with a gentle light not yet adequately discerned among the effulgent constellation of which they form part. As the ages pass on, the Christian people find out new needs, over which, in due time, new Patrons are raised up to preside. The holy women about our Lord have already an order named after them, the Faithful Companions of Jesus, and the beautiful work of the Holy Infancy has its natural patrons in those Holy Innocents of whom we are speaking.

The devotion to the Holy Innocents cannot, however, be called a new devotion, nor is the honour paid to them any growth of modern times. From the earliest ages the three kinds of martyrdom have

been honoured in the festivals which immediately succeed Christmas Day, the martyrdom of will and deed in St. Stephen, the martydom of will without deed in St. John, the martyrdom of deed without will in those glorious children of Bethlehem. If we allot to each of them those who suffer for our Lord in the same variety of ways, we shall find that the Holy Innocents must have a large flock of human sufferers to watch over from their thrones in Heaven. There are comparatively few who reach the cross of St. Stephen, there are many more, it may be supposed, who gather themselves under the sceptre of St. John. But who can count the involuntary sufferers for the faith, the Church, the truth, from the persecutors of the world, and far worse, from the legacies and inheritances of spiritual, moral, and even physical miseries from generations of persecution, of heresy and schism, dominating whole countries, miseries which involve their victims in darkness which they think to be light, in evil which they take to be good? For all such it is a consolation to feel that our Lord has provided natural intercessors in these blessed children. More than this, this lavish beneficence to them is a disclosure of the love which the Sacred Heart feels for this most pitiable kind of suffering, wherever it is to be found, and of the treasures of grace and of glory with which He has in His power to reward it.

Lastly, it may be said that this great glory and power conferred by our Lord on the Holy Innocents, is even more natural, in the sense in which we use the word, in their case than in others, on account of their special position as the first-fruits, not only

of service rendered to God in His new Kingdom, but of that special kind of service which consists in martyrdom. We are considering this whole cluster of the mysteries of this part of the Holy Infancy as having been brought about and recorded for us with a special view to their relation to the rule of God's Providence in the permission of persecution. This groups them together, the Epiphany, the Flight, the Massacre of the Innocents, and the Return, and separates them in some measure from the mysteries which preceded them, as well as from those which followed them in the order of time. Now it is a part of the Providential system with regard to persecution, that those who suffer in this way should be very highly rewarded, and those who are the agents of cruelty and make themselves the enemies of God in this way should be very severely and conspicuously punished. The reward of the martyrs cannot come in this world to themselves, but their reward constantly comes in the fruitfulness of their blood in the Church in this world, as well as in their glory and power in the Church above. The chastisement of the enemies of God is often, in ordinary cases, reserved for the next world, but it is very frequently indeed inflicted in this world also, for reasons which may more than once be mentioned in this history. Thus there is a great fitness in the glory of the Holy Innocents, as there is a great fitness, on the other hand, in the fearful end of their persecutor. But we must speak in the following chapter of the death of Herod.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE RETURN FROM EGYPT.

St. Matt. ii. 19—23; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 14.

THE figure of the first Herod filled so large a space in the minds and memories of his contemporaries and of their immediate successors among the Jews, that it may be worth our while to pause a moment at the point when he was removed from the scene by the just vengeance of God, not long after the massacre of the innocent children of Bethlehem of whom we have been lately speaking. The death of Herod belongs to the history of the Gospels, because he was the first of a long line of the persecutors of our Lord and His Church, on whom, as has been said, the hand of Providence fell heavily, to mark him as an enemy of God who was not allowed to leave this world without the brand of the Divine displeasure upon him. The remembrance of what he had been long survived him in the mind of the holy nation, and his children, some of whom inherited his character as well as parts of his dominions, must have kept alive in the people the hatred in which his name was held.

He was one of the most successful men of his own time, or indeed of any time, and there can be little

doubt that the world must have held him in honour, on account of the great ability which he had displayed in the carving out and maintenance of his own fortunes. He was well known and understood by the masters of the Roman world in his time, and he succeeded in making himself acceptable to Mark Antony after having been on the side of Brutus and Cassius, and to Octavius after having taken the side of Mark Antony. By the favour of the Romans he had risen to his great fortune, and he reigned in Jerusalem though he was by race an Edomite. To the Jews his sovereignty must always have been most odious. The very fact of his possessing the throne was a mark that the sceptre had departed from Juda, according to the prophecy of Jacob. But for many years before his death, and probably long after it, his name was a terror to the people, who felt that in him they had a master who would hesitate at nothing for any purpose of his own, and who was most suspicious in taking alarm at anything that might savour of an attack against his usurped power, as well as most cruel in quenching any such attack in blood.

It is not easy to make out a complete list of the number of persons who had at various times been sacrificed to the jealousy of Herod. He had early distinguished himself as a man of blood, before he attained by the favour of Antony the royal power from the Roman Senate. His earlier achievements in assassination were soon obliterated by his acts when he came into the exercise of the supreme power. One of his first acts was the wholesale murder of the Sanhedrin, except one or two persons.

He had already obtained of the venality of Mark Antony the murder of the prisoner Antigonus, who had reigned for a short time in Jerusalem by the favour of the Parthians. His own brother-in-law, Aristobulus, was his next victim. When Herod was summoned, at the instance of Cleopatra, to give an account of this murder before the tribunal of Antony, he left orders that, if his case went unfavourably, his wife Mariamne, to whom he was in his savage way devotedly attached, should be put to death immediately on the arrival of the intelligence. On his return with an acquittal, he put to death his uncle Joseph, and he is actually said to have thought of murdering Cleopatra, who about that time paid a visit to Jerusalem, alleging that he might thus save his patron Antony from certain ruin. After the battle of Actium, Herod was again in danger, on account of his adherence to the losing side in the great conflict for empire. He again made his way to the favour of Octavius, who probably saw in him what Antony had seen, a ruler of Judæa whom it was to the interest of Rome to support, because the nation over whom he ruled would never rally round him in any attempt to shake off the yoke of the Empire. On leaving Jerusalem for his visit to Octavius, Herod had again ordered the murder of Mariamne if his suit proved unsuccessful. The order was revealed to her this time, as it had been revealed before, and on his return she reproached him with having given it. This was the signal for an outburst on his part which led to her execution, and after that to the murder of her mother, Alexandra, also. He had already murdered Hyrcanus

the Second, who was living in privacy in Jerusalem, and he now also ordered the execution of certain others, whose only crime was that they belonged to the illustrious family of the Machabees.

Other murders followed, at no great distance of time, after Herod found himself secure in the possession of the favour of Augustus. His last deeds in this way were the murder of his two sons by Mariamne, Alexander and Aristobulus, followed also by that of his eldest son, Antipater, whose intrigues had induced him to the execution of his younger brothers. The list we have given is not quite complete, but it is sufficiently so to give ourselves an idea of the character of the man whom the Jewish historian, Josephus, nevertheless evidently admires and warmly praises, as far as it is possible so to do. Herod was not without qualities which made him a fit ruler for a people like the Jews. Once, in a time of severe pestilence, he lavished enormous sums of money in the relief of the sufferers, and as is well known, he volunteered to rebuild, or rather finish, the great Temple at Jerusalem, and he carried out his design at an immense cost and with the labour of years. But he was as ready to build a temple of Augustus at Samaria, as to lavish his magnificence on the Temple at Jerusalem. Herod at one time incurred the danger of assassination by endeavouring to introduce Pagan customs, games, and institutions into the sacred city. The greater number of the murders of which he was guilty were probably the result of the extreme suspiciousness of his character. He was conscious that he was an alien and had no right to the throne,

while there were many living who were connected with the Asmonean line, which had shed so much glory upon the Jewish nation during the last generations before the coming of our Lord. He never felt himself safe, for he knew he was where he had no right to be, and that the whole people looked upon him with hatred as an alien, whom they would rejoice to be rid of if they could.

Among the many murders of which Herod had been guilty, the massacre of the Innocents was perhaps one of those which gave him the least anxiety. The holy children left none behind them who would think of avenging their blood. He had often to deal with the fanaticism, as he considered it, of the Jewish nation, and a tumult of the Pharisees or Sadducees would cost him more thought than the desolation of a score or two of cottage-homes in the little city of David. But he was now growing old, and the time of retribution was at hand. Probably the death of the Innocents was one of his last crimes. He would not consider that it was one which might bring upon him the vengeance of Heaven. His career of murder had been long, and what harm had ever come to him in consequence? But now he had lifted his hand against the Incarnate Son of God, and had touched the work which God was especially bound to defend. He had attained even greater power, or at least, greater security, after the murder of his wife and mother-in-law, so many of his and her relatives, his own sons, and a number of other victims. But the murder of these children marked the last excess permitted to him. The voices of weeping heard

in Rama had their echoes before the throne of God.

A disease fell on Herod from which he could not hope to recover. He became insupportable to himself and others from the sourness and gloom of his temper. He knew that his subjects would rejoice at his death, and he desired to make them weep. A sedition broke out, occasioned by a golden eagle, which he had placed over the portal of the Temple. It was torn down by the people, broken to pieces, and trampled under foot. The mob had been headed by two distinguished Rabbis, who were burnt alive, with their accomplices, by the order of the dying King.

Then he had himself conveyed to some bituminous springs, not far from Jericho, in hopes that he might there bathe, and obtain some relief. Josephus describes his symptoms—a slow fever, the heat of which penetrated his very bones, an insatiable appetite for food which did not nourish him, virulent ulcers tearing at his intestines, his feet and joints all swollen with dropsy, and parts of his body eaten by worms. The fetid stench which came from him was intolerable. All his nerves were contracted, his breathing was short and difficult. The very doctors declared that the hand of God was on him. When he was plunged in the bath, his body seemed to be falling to pieces. He was taken back to his bed, as if to die at once. The rumour of his death spread prematurely, and was received with transports of joy.

The King determined on a revenge truly Herodian. He ordered the chief members of the prin-

cipal families of the Jews to be apprehended, and confined in the Hippodrome. He told his sister, Salome, who had been his adviser in many of his murderous projects, that as soon as he was dead, she was to order his archers to shoot down this assembled multitude, that the Jews might have something to lament for. He then attempted to stab himself with a knife he had used to cut an apple, but his nephew flung himself on him, and prevented the suicide. Again the false rumour spread that Herod was dead. It reached his son, Antipater, in his prison, and the young prince manifested intense joy, begging his guards to set him at liberty at once. Herod heard of it, and immediately ordered his execution. Five days later, he died. His cruel orders about the Jewish families were not executed, for Salome, in the hope of making herself popular, and perhaps also out of fear, did not execute the commission he had given to her. Herod's obsequies were celebrated with the utmost pomp and magnificence.

The length of time during which our Lord remained in Egypt with His Mother and St. Joseph cannot be fixed with absolute certainty. The time must depend on the date of the death of Herod, and on that of the Epiphany. The last-named of these two dates cannot be ascertained, except by a probable conjecture. We can arrive at a certain great probability as to the Birth of our Lord, though even as to this there will never be absolute unanimity. We have seen that the arrival of the Wise Kings may have been within four or five months after the Birth of our Lord. As it is not certain at

what precise point in the reign of Herod this Birth might be fixed, we are consequently unable to say how old our Lord was when this persecuting King died. It seems likely that his death took place at no great interval after the flight into Egypt, though some writers allow five years or more for the length of the sojourn. Persecutors may sometimes survive their victims many years, but the blow which strikes them down has a more marked connection with their crime when it follows swiftly and suddenly.

For whatever length of time, then, it may have been ordained in the dispositions of the Providence of the Father, our Lord remained in the obscurity of His exile in the land which was so full of memories of the early history of the holy nation, and which was to become so famous in the annals of the Christian Church which He was to found. When we remember, as we are always bound to remember, the full perfection in which our Lord lived as Man, even while a Child in His Mother's arms, it is not difficult to imagine that His Sacred Heart was most actively occupied during His Egyptian sojourn. Prayer and adoration rose from Him ceaselessly to the throne of His Father. He was already arranging for the foundation of His Kingdom in the country of the Pharaos and the Ptolemies, containing, as we have said, an immense Jewish population, flourishing in every sense, and forming a centre, wherever it was to be found, around which the best of the heathen of the many various nationalities among whom they lived would naturally gather. He was taking possession of Egypt for

His Church, and enriching it with that unexampled fertility of Christian asceticism which is its chief glory, even though it was to give birth to Origen, Athanasius, Cyril, and so many other illustrious saints. All the future glories of that great Church were present to the mind and Heart of our Lord, and if this was so, as it certainly was, it is natural to think that He offered them and gave thanks for them to His Father, that He prayed for them, and blessed them, and applied to them, out of the treasures of grace to be won by the Redemption, those abundant aids and supplies of which His future saints and children stood in need. The places also which were to become the homes of so much sanctity, were blessed and consecrated by His sojourn in their neighbourhood. The very air of the country, its soil, its rocks and caves, its multitudinous cities and villages, and the marvellous river which sustains all that fertility and richness, became hallowed by His presence.

Meanwhile, the interior life of the Sacred Heart was going on day after day and night after night, His incessant activity in the worship of God and the sanctification of men. The Holy Family now tasted in a peculiar degree the joy of that perfect dependence on God's Providence which is the privilege of the homeless and the exile, and were continually receiving fresh evidences of His watchful and most tender care. Whether from the Jews resident in the country or from the heathen Egyptians themselves, there came day by day provision for any need that might weigh upon them. This provision was a cause of intense and rejoicing

thankfulness, and was abundantly repaid to those from whom it came in prayers and blessings from God on their hospitality. The interior sanctification of Mary and Joseph, the great work of our Lord in souls at this time, proceeded with strides of immense rapidity, and the souls of all around them could not have been unaffected by the neighbourhood of so much grace and by their simple, and humble, and heavenly conversation. The time of the sojourn was long enough for them to make themselves a home in the town or village where they had settled. They must have had kindly relations with many about them. St. Joseph worked at his trade, Mary occupied herself in the cares of the humble household, and far more, in constant and adoring companionship with her Divine Child.

Then, at the appointed time, in the justice of God, the blow fell on Herod. We have already spoken of the circumstances of his death. The news spread like the tidings of the cessation of a great plague or of the gaining of some great national victory. All over the land which he had ruled there was joy in every household, joy which was too genuine and heartfelt to let itself be immediately tempered by the thought that, though Herod was gone, the hated and usurping family of which he had been the head still existed and was still to reign. The dominion of the Edomites must continue, or be changed for the direct subjection of the country to the Roman yoke, a yoke, perhaps, of greater justice and security for personal liberty and safety, but still an alien yoke and a yoke of inexorable severity. Still, Herod was dead. Men were

no longer under the dread of what fresh evils might spring from the murderous caprices and revengeful instincts of a tyrant whose malice and cruelty seemed only to increase in intensity with his years. Whatever his sons might be, he was gone. The future might have many evils in its bosom. But at least, Herod was no more.

The news may have reached the part of Egypt in which the Holy Family were now settled, before any Divine intimation was given as to the course which they were to take. The Angel had instructed St. Joseph to remain in Egypt until he received some fresh guidance, and this was not long delayed. "Now Herod being dead, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph in Egypt, saying, Rise and take the Child and His Mother, and go into the land of Israel, for they are dead who sought the life of the Child." Divine Providence used the same means with St. Joseph as before. It was enough to speak to him in a dream, for his simple and docile soul was always ready with the promptest obedience, and this was the manner in which the will of God was made known to him and recognized by him. The Angel may reasonably be supposed to have been St. Gabriel, who appears to have been charged especially with the carrying out of the Divine economy of the Incarnation. The precept which is given by him to St. Joseph is remarkable, when we consider the manner in which the place of residence of the Holy Family, for the remaining long years of the Hidden Life, was ultimately decided. It was clearly the will of God that our Lord's youth and manhood, until He was of the

age of thirty years, should be passed at Nazareth. As St. Matthew tells us, He was to be called a Nazarene. But the holy Angel does not at once give St. Joseph any definite injunction on this point. He merely bids him take the Child and His Mother, and go into the land of Israel. These words would include the whole of what we call Palestine, whether the place of abode were to be in Judæa or in Galilee. It is left to the prudence of St. Joseph himself to discern the necessity or convenience of avoiding Bethlehem, or any other spot in the land of Judæa, properly so called.

It appears to be the rule of these Divine communications, to descend into particulars only so far as is quite necessary for the moment. Thus St. Joseph had been told not to hesitate about taking to him our Blessed Lady his wife, after the Visitation, because then there was reasonable need for some Divine guidance as to that point. He had not been told, as far as we know, anything about taking our Blessed Lady with him to Bethlehem on the occasion of the enrolment, because that was a matter in which the authority of the decree of the secular power was sufficient. Again, we are not told of any Divine order enjoining him to betake himself with our Lady and her Divine Child, to Bethlehem, after their first return to Nazareth which followed on the Purification. That was a matter, as it seems, as to which his own prudent choice was enough. He was told to fly into Egypt, when the persecution of Herod was imminent, because it was the will of God that that country should be, for the space of time contained in the exile, the home of

the Holy Family. Now he is told to return into the land of Israel, "for they are dead who sought the life of the Child." It is left to himself to discover that the spot which he might have naturally selected might not be the most convenient for the purpose to which he was devoted, the guardianship of Mary and her Child during the years of the Hidden Life. It must now have been clear to him that there was to be nothing openly miraculous about the childhood and youth of the Incarnate God. He was to grow and live like other children, to be exposed to any dangers and trials which He would have had to incur if He had been a simple man. This therefore increased greatly the responsibility of His blessed foster-father, who was now to choose and direct for the best according to his own judgment, guided always by the Holy Ghost, but interfered with supernaturally only in cases when at times such interference was required.

It is probable from the whole history as it is given us by St. Matthew, that St. Joseph would naturally have preferred that the home of the Holy Family should be at Bethlehem. Unless we are mistaken in the view which has been taken of the circumstances under which the Wise Princes found our Lord in that city, St. Joseph had already removed thither from Nazareth, and was on the point of fixing his abode where our Lord had been born. It was most natural that the Son of David should be brought up in the city of David. St. John tells us that this was not only the expectation of the learned, as we find from the account of the answer of the Sanhedrin to Herod in St. Matthew, but also com-

monly believed among the people. "Doth not the Scripture say that Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of Bethlehem, the town where David was?"[1] At the same time the Evangelist mentions another popular tradition about the hiddenness of the origin of the Christ. "We know this Man whence He is, but when the Christ cometh, no man knoweth whence He is."[2] There may have been other reasons, as has been already said, for the inclination of St. Joseph for the place which was probably his own birthplace, and the home of his childhood. Some reason, therefore, was needed, in the Providence of God, to change his plan, in so far as it tended to a settlement at Bethlehem, or at all events to make him think of changing them.

This reason is supplied for us by the Evangelist St. Matthew, in his account of the return from Egypt. It appears that the Holy Family may have left Egypt and taken the road towards Bethlehem. But they were soon met by the report that in the distribution of the various provinces which had been included in the dominions of Herod, Judæa, in which Bethlehem lay, fell to the lot of Archelaus. The character of this son of Herod was well known, and St. Joseph feared that he might inherit the policy and the cruelty of his father, and that therefore Bethlehem would be no safe place for the home of the Blessed Child and His Mother. The son of Herod who was probably most like his father in character and unscrupulous ferocity was the Antipater who had brought about the murder of his brothers Alexander and Aristobulus, the sons of the

[1] St. John vii. 42. [2] St. John vii. 27.

Asmonean princess Mariamne. But Antipater had been put to death by Herod's order in the very last days of his fatal malady. Archelaus, however, soon made himself odious and intolerable, and, after some years, his unfitness for the throne furnished the Roman Emperor with a decent pretext for transforming Judæa into a province of the Empire.

There were probably many divine reasons for the selection of Nazareth as the home of our Lord. Notwithstanding the tradition which is mentioned by the people in the Temple, as we are told by St. John, that the Christ should come from Bethlehem, it seems to have been generally unknown, during our Lord's lifetime, that He had been born there. Perhaps if He had lived there, it might have attracted to Him persecution from the very first at the hands of the Roman Governor, as well as the opposition which He had to undergo from the Chief Priests and Scribes at Jerusalem. He was always the Prophet of Nazareth of Galilee. All that beautiful arrangement of Providence, whereby His preaching began and continued for so long in that remote and populous province, naturally by far the fittest field for missionary exertions, as we should now phrase it, might have been lost to us, if He had been brought up at Bethlehem. This, however, is only to say that the history would not have been exactly what it is. That it would have been equally beautiful and instructive, no one can doubt. Wherever our Lord had lived and preached, amid whatever people, and under whatever circumstances, He must have been the centre of spiritual life and light, gathering around Him the interest of Heaven and

earth alike, and making everything glow with His radiance, as the sun lights up the clouds through which he makes his way in whatever part of the heavens his course may lie. As soon as St. Joseph made up his mind that Bethlehem would be no safe home for the Holy Family, he would naturally think at once of bending his steps to Nazareth. This natural conclusion was not, however, adopted by him without fresh heavenly guidance. "Being warned in sleep, he retired into the parts of Galilee, and he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled what was said by the prophets, that He shall be called a Nazarene."

Thus it is that St. Matthew first introduces us to the sojourn of our Lord at Nazareth. The Galilæan city has never been mentioned by him before. It is clear that here also, as has been said, he is writing, as we should say, apologetically. He is explaining how exactly the prophecies were fulfilled, even in those features of the life of our Lord which were most contrary to the common expectation concerning the Messias. The Galilæan origin of our Lord and of His whole preaching was a constant topic, we cannot doubt, with the Scribes and Pharisees in their objections to His claims. "Search the Scriptures," they said to Nicodemus, "and see that out of Galilee a prophet riseth not."[3] The objection must have been repeated a hundred times over in the early years of the Church, especially while the Apostles were still teaching at Jerusalem. St. Matthew had a direct intention of furnishing the early teachers with answers to such objections. He meets this

3 St. John vii. 52.

difficulty here in his own simple way, by asserting that our Lord's residence in Nazareth was a distinct fulfilment, not a contradiction, of the prophecies. He has already proved that He was not born at Nazareth, but at Bethlehem. No historical fact could have better evidence than that furnished by the history of the Epiphany and of the massacre of the Innocents. And now he explains how it was that, having been born at Bethlehem, our Lord lived so long at Nazareth, and was, in the eyes of the world, a Nazarene. And, he adds, this is exactly what He was to be. "That it might be fulfilled what was said by the prophets, that He shall be called a Nazarene."

The blessed Evangelist does not add in this case, as in the former cases in which he has appealed in the same way to the prophecies, any one particular text in which this prediction is made. He names the prophets in general as his authority. We have left the other prophecies which St. Matthew has adduced, both as to our Lord's residence in Egypt and as to the massacre of the children, to be considered here along with this last statement of St. Matthew about the title of Nazarene. They are best considered together, inasmuch as they illustrate so beautifully the manner in which the mind of St. Matthew fastens on the prophetical anticipations concerning our Lord. The next chapter will be devoted to the consideration of this subject.

CHAPTER XV.

FULFILMENT OF PROPHECY.

St. Matt. ii. 1—23; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, §§ 12—14.

We have already explained the object of St. Matthew in those sections of his Gospel which are contained in what to us is the second chapter. It is clear that the Evangelist has selected certain points in the history of the Sacred Infancy, while he has certainly omitted others which must have been well known to him. No Apostle could be ignorant of such mysteries as the Annunciation of our Blessed Lady, the Visitation, or of the details of the Nativity itself. The Purification and Presentation in the Temple must have been familiar to him. He has omitted all these, and has selected those other points which he gives with an evident object, which is not in any way concealed from us, for it is set forth in the very form of his narrative. For his narrative is made up of a series of short sections, each one of which is ended by him with a reference to prophecy.

It is, therefore, natural to conclude that the bearing of the incidents which are here recorded on the prophetical anticipations concerning the Messias which were the great treasure of the chosen people, furnished St. Matthew with some reason for his in-

sertion of these particular incidents, while others were omitted. It is not meant that these incidents are not important in themselves, or again, that other incidents, not mentioned by St. Matthew, might not have been made the subject of similar illustrations from prophecy. Another characteristic of these incidents has also to be taken into account. They were incidents or features in the early history of our Lord which were in themselves such as to require some explanation or vindication at the hands of those who had the office of setting forth the proof, from prophecy, of the truth that our Lord was the promised Messias. When this characteristic is also considered, we have probably a complete account of the reasons which guided St. Matthew in this part of his Gospel.

We are here met by another truth which is of much importance in enabling us to understand the mind and the method of this first historian of our Lord. St. Matthew evidently took immense delight in the illustration of the Life of our Lord from the prophetical writings. His method of using these writings is not exactly the same with the manner in which St. Paul sometimes argues from the Old Testament, as for instance, in the famous allegory about Sara and Agar in the Epistle to the Galatians. There is, however, much similarity between the two methods, though St. Paul's manner is more that of the traditional interpretations handed on in the Jewish schools, with which he may have become familiar when he was a pupil of the famous Rabbi, Gamaliel. St. Matthew's mind is penetrated with the truth that the whole of the Old Testament his-

tory was itself a prophecy and anticipation of our Lord. He takes the incidents themselves as parts of the prophecy, as well as the words of the prophets in this or that place. His quotations and references are thus such as to attract the adverse criticism of narrow minds, incapable of large views of history, and, as a matter of fact, this criticism has not been wanting with reference to the quotations which he has made in that part of his Gospel which we are now considering.

The references to prophecy in this section of St. Matthew are four in number. The first of these need not detain us. It is the citation of the famous prophecy of Micheas which predicted the Birth of our Lord at Bethlehem, and which was alleged by the elders at Jerusalem in answer to the question formally put to them by Herod, where Christ was to be born. It is evident on the face of the narrative that this prophecy was believed by the highest authorities in the holy nation, at the time of our Lord's Birth, to be what we call the classical passage in the Old Testament with regard to the question put to them by Herod in consequence of the arrival of the Wise Princes. The answer of the Sanhedrin, or collection of learned men, whichever the assembly was that was interrogated by Herod, was accepted at once as conclusive, and, as to this point, there can be no criticism made on St. Matthew's citation which cannot be dismissed at once as obviously futile.

The next quotation made by the Evangelist has reference to the flight into Egypt, or, to speak more strictly, the return from Egypt after the residence of

the Holy Family in that country. St. Matthew tells us that St. Joseph remained in Egyyt until the death of Herod, "that it might be fulfilled which the Lord spake by the Prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called My Son."[1] These words are taken from a well-known passage in the prophecy of Oseas, though to some writers they have seemed to be found in the prophecy of Balaam contained in the Book of Numbers.[2] The truth is that the words of Balaam relate to the historical fact which is spoken of by Oseas, but Balaam says nothing of that which is the most important element in the words of Oseas, namely, that by that Prophet the people of Israel is spoken of as the Son of God. In both cases, however, as, indeed, in the quotation by St. Matthew, the calling out of Egypt is not spoken of as something future, but as something past. It is not said, "I will call My Son out of Egypt." It is said, "I have called My Son out of Egypt," and it is this historical assertion by the Prophet which is said by St. Matthew to have been "fulfilled," when, after the reason for the residence in exile was ended by the death of the persecutor, St. Joseph returned, at the bidding of the Angel, into the land of Israel.

The criticism that is made on this citation of St. Matthew fastens on the evident fact that the Prophet is speaking of the Israelite people, and that he refers to the Exodus in the time of Moses. "Because Israel was a child, and I loved him, and I called My Son out of Egypt." This cannot be questioned. But it does not touch the truth of the allegation of the prophecy by St. Matthew in con-

[1] Osee xi. 1. [2] Numbers xxiii. 22.

firmation of the Divine Sonship of our Lord. The people of Israel, even in the days of Moses, was called the Son and the First-born of God. The appellation is found in the threat which Moses was commissioned to use to the hardened Egyptian King, at the very beginning of the long series of his interviews with him with the object of procuring the deliverance of the people. "Thou shalt say to him, Thus saith the Lord, Israel is My Son, My First-born. I have said to thee, Let My Son go that He may serve Me, and thou wouldest not let Him go, behold I will kill thy son, thy first-born."[3]

The reason why Israel is called by this name of the first-born Son of God is that in that nation were now enshrined the promises made to Abraham and the other patriarchs after him, that in their seed should all nations of the earth be blessed. That is, Israel was called the Son of God, because of him was to come the Incarnate Son of God, promised from the beginning of human history as the future Redeemer. St. Paul argues in this way in the Epistle to the Galatians, that the promises made to Abraham and his seed were made to Christ. "To Abraham were the promises made, and to his seed. He saith not, and to thy seeds, as of many, but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ."[4] The deliverance from Egypt was vouchsafed to the people of Israel because it represented typically our Lord, the true Son of God, and but for this truth, that deliverance would not have been vouchsafed.

St. Matthew, then, points out that the circumstance of the calling out of Egypt, spoken of by

3 Exodus iv. 22, 23. 4 Galat. iii. 16.

Oseas historically, was a circumstance which represented prophetically the residence of our Lord in Egypt and His being called out of that country when, in the Providence of His Father, the time for the exile came to an end. And he chooses out of all the records of the Exodus in the Old Testament this one contained in the words of the Prophet, because its very language signified the typical identity, in the Divine counsels, of the people of Israel with the Incarnate Son of God Who had been born at Bethlehem. Thus his use of the prophecy lights up the history referred to by the Prophet, by showing the Divine reason why so peculiar a favour and protection had always been extended to the chosen people. That reason lay in the fact that the people represented our Lord, and was beloved of God in an especial manner and degree for the sake of our Lord. This truth is actually expressed in the words of Oseas, who says that because Israel was a Child, I loved him, and I called My Son out of Egypt. Israel was beloved, and delivered from Egypt, because God looked on him as His Son for the sake of our Lord. The correspondence in the actual history of the type with that of the antitype is the point on which St. Matthew fastens, the truth on which he invites the minds of the Jewish converts to feed, a truth which might further open to them a long line of contemplations concerning the other typical anticipations contained in the history of Israel.

The next of St. Matthew's illustrations from the prophecies is the famous passage in which he quotes the words of the Prophet Jeremias in connection

with the slaughter of the Innocents. He says that in that slaughter "was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremias the Prophet, saying, A voice in Rama was heard, lamentation and great mourning, Rachel bewailing her children, and would not be comforted, because they were not."[5] This passage occurs in a part of the Prophet's writings in which he seems historically to refer to the captivity which was carried out in the days of Jeremias. It appears that Rama of Benjamin was the place at which the captain of the Chaldæan guard, who was to escort the captives to the country of their exile, assembled them before the march was begun. It was near that place, which was itself near Bethlehem, that Rachel, the beloved wife of Jacob, had been buried, after giving birth to the Patriarch Benjamin. Her tomb was a well-known object near the road, and is mentioned in several passages in the historical books of the Old Testament.

Thus Rachel, the mother of the tribe of Benjamin, is represented as weeping for the departure of her children, and the Prophet adds words of consolation which appear to refer to the return of exiles from their captivity. "Thus saith the Lord. Let thy voice cease from weeping, and thine eyes from tears, for there is a reward for thy work, saith the Lord, and they shall return out of the land of the enemy." The prophecy goes on to speak of a restoration for Ephraim, a tribe also sprung from Jacob and Rachel, and his language soon rises into a prediction of conversion and other great spiritual blessings. The passage immediately following this con-

5 Jerem. xxxi. 15.

tains the famous prophecy of the Incarnation, in the words, "the Lord hath created a new thing upon the earth, a woman shall compass a man." It goes on to speak of other glories, the new covenant that God will make with His people, and clearly refers to the Kingdom of our Lord. What is important to note is, that a great part of the prophecy cannot possibly be understood of a literal return of the captive children of Rachel from Babylon.

If we suppose with, as it seems, the majority of commentators, that there is in the passage quoted by St. Matthew a true reference to the incident in the Prophet's own time, we may see in the mind of Jeremias a prevision of the slaughter of the Holy Innocents, or rather, of the lamentations and cries of their bereaved mothers, as represented typically by the mourning which had taken place when the exiles departed for Babylonia. If the prophecy be understood literally of the departure of the exiles only, more than one inconvenience must follow. For the greater number of, perhaps for all these captives, the return promised in the prophecy could never have taken place. Moreover, the famous prediction of the Virginal conception of our Lord stamps the whole prophecy to which it belongs as Messianic, and thus fixes the date of the accomplishment of the whole to the time of our Lord. The new covenant which is promised towards the end of the passage, and other portions of the prophecy as well, cannot be separated from the same epoch, the same great design in the counsels of God. The coming of our Lord is, indeed, the end to which all prophecies converge. It would not have been difficult to

adapt these verses of Jeremias to the historical fact of the mourning for the Innocents, even if there had been no incident contemporaneous with the Prophet himself to which they appear to refer. As there is this incident, St. Matthew's authority is enough to make us see that it bore the same relation to the mourning for the Innocents, that the calling of the people of Israel out of Egypt bore to the summons thence of the Incarnate Son of God, as represented by the people of Israel.

In each of these references to historical anticipations of events connected with our Lord, St. Matthew seems to open to us great truths connected with these events. As the chosen people went out of the land of Egypt to suffer long wanderings in the desert, and then to begin a career of victory and conquest which put them into the possession of the Promised Land, so the return of our Lord to the land of Israel was to be succeeded by long retirements at Nazareth, and then by the three glorious years of His Ministry, in which the foundations of His Kingdom were most firmly laid. Our Lord's youth and Hidden Life were the appointed preparation for His work in the world, and this preparation was, in its turn, founded on the years of exile and humiliation in Egypt, in which He underwent persecution, as the people who typified Him had been persecuted before Him.

In the same way with the mourning mothers of Bethlehem. Great recompences are promised in the prophecy for the sufferings endured by those who wept for the captives who were on their way to the land of exile, recompences which must be figura-

tively understood, for these captives were of the tribes which did not return. The true consolation is for those who had lost their innocent children for the sake of our Lord. As we have seen, the Providence of God was very magnificent indeed in the blessings which He was to shower upon these children, making them at once great saints and princes in His Kingdom. And in them, and in their reward, it is natural to include all those who were afterwards to be sufferers in any way for our Lord, and witnesses to Him by means of their sufferings. All such were to be most highly blessed in the new Kingdom, and their reward was to be exceedingly great. This was a distinctive feature of the Kingdom of the Incarnation, which was before the mind of Jeremias at the time of the prophecy. Being so great a feature, it was to have its place in the prophetic anticipation of His Kingdom. Thus we may consider that St. Matthew was commissioned to point this out in the passage before us, which thus becomes not merely a reference to prophecy, but a description of a divinely ordained part of the dispensation of the Incarnation, to which the attention of the early Christians might be directed with the greatest profit to themselves.

We must now pass on to the last of the fulfilments of prophecy in the history of the Holy Infancy to which St. Matthew draws our attention. He tells us that the settlement of the Holy Family at Nazareth involved such a fulfilment, because it had been predicted that our Lord "should be called a Nazarene." "And coming He dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was said

by the prophets, that He should be called a Nazarene." It is remarkable that he does not here quote any prophet, and indeed, as some of the Fathers say, we should search in vain to find his exact words in any extant prophetical book. St. Matthew says that "it was said," or spoken by the prophets, as if on purpose to guide us rather to the general purport of many prophecies than to the direct words of any single prophet.

There is naturally a great discord of opinion among Christian writers as to the prophecies to which St. Matthew refers. We must again remind ourselves that his words were directly addressed to Jewish converts, and, perhaps, through them, to the opponents of Christianity among the Jews. They must have been deeply familiar with the Sacred Scriptures, and it would have been foolish, as well as impossible, for St. Matthew to attempt to found an argument, or even an illustration, upon any interpretation which would not be acknowledged by such persons as reasonable. At the same time, it is clear from the whole Gospel of St. Matthew that he was extremely keen in discovering anticipations of the circumstances of our Lord's Life in the Old Testament, and that it was natural to him to meet the objections made against our Lord by learned Jews from Scripture, by retorting the argument, and showing that the very point objected to was a fresh proof of the correspondence between the features of our Lord's Life and the Scriptural predictions.

It must also be remembered, that we cannot expect to find that the local and general prejudices

which prevailed against this or that class, this or that place, in the Holy Land, present themselves to us with anything like the force which they had in our Lord's own time. We know, for instance, that the "publicans" were held in general disesteem among the Jews of our Lord's time, but we do not always realize what that disesteem was founded on, that it embodied the bitter national feeling against all who represented the alien and oppressive Government, as well as the contempt for men who were exposed to all the moral evils of a life spent in exacting customs and dues. In the same way, perhaps, we should find, if we could invest ourselves with the feelings and prejudices which marked out Nazareth, for whatever reason, as a place of ill-repute among the neighbouring towns of Galilee, that to say that our Lord had been spoken of by the prophets as One Who should be called a Nazarene, was a short way of summing up all those many sayings of the prophets which speak of Him as despised, rejected, ill-thought of, dishonoured, "the scorn of men, and the outcast of the people."

In all countries there are certain towns or provinces which have a bad name, so that it is enough to condemn a man at once to say that he belongs to such and such a place. Such names often become appellatives in the sense that they are given to persons who have certain low qualities, whether they belong to the places designated or not. Thus, when a man is said in our language to be a Jew, or a Turk, or a Tartar, it is meant that he is sharp and avaricious, set on low gains, or a bully in his family, or one whom it is better not to provoke, and the

like. There is some evidence in the New Testament that the Jewish nation was one of those which are very full of local prejudices and antipathies, such as made the people of Galilee, or Judæa proper, avoid all intercourse with the Samaritans, or the holy Nathanael ask contemptuously, when on the very eve of becoming our Lord's disciple after passing through the school of St. John, whether any good thing could come of Nazareth? If we can suppose that the name Nazarene had become, in this sense, a common term of contempt, we should not have much difficulty in understanding that this is the meaning of St. Matthew, when he tells us that the prophets had spoken of the coming Messias as one who should be called a Nazarene.

This anticipation, however, although it is included in the explanation of the place before us by many of the best commentators, is not generally accepted as sufficient in itself. Without going at length into the whole list of other interpretations, it will be enough for us to strengthen the explanation already given by adding to it what has a fair claim to be considered the interpretation of Christian antiquity, by no means inconsistent with what has been said, but bringing in a considerable number of prophetic texts which, when they are examined critically, show us that the name itself of Nazarene had been notoriously applied to our Lord, in the description given of the Messias. St. Jerome, in his commentary on the famous passage at the beginning of the eleventh chapter of Isaias, "There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root," and the rest—a pas-

sage which is as clearly a prediction of our Lord as any that can be found in the Old Testament—tells us that the learned Hebrews consider that the statement of St. Matthew about the name Nazarene is taken from that passage.

The learned men whom he cites thought that the passages referred to by St. Matthew were those in Isaias, in Jeremias, in some of the Psalms, and also in Zacharias, in which our Lord is spoken of as the Branch, or, as it is sometimes translated, the Orient or dayspring. We have mentioned some of these passages in our remarks on the Canticle of St. Zachary, which, as is well known, is full of allusion to names.[6] It may therefore be considered as some confirmation of this interpretation, that the father of St. John refers, at the end of his canticle, to these prophetic expressions. It is well known that the same Hebrew word is not always used in these predictions, and that is, so far, a difficulty to be met by those who adopt this interpretation in the case now before us. But in this famous passage of the eleventh chapter of Isaias, the Hebrew word which is used is that from which the name Nazareth is derived. The antiquity of this interpretation cannot be questioned, for it rests, not only on the evidence of St. Jerome, but on that of Jewish writers most hostile to Christianity, who testify to the fact that this was the Christian interpretation, by attempting to confute it in their own commentaries on the Prophet. This interpretation of the names Nazareth and Nazarene, by which our Lord is said to be designated as the flower of Galilee, is, as has

[6] See the preceding volume, *The Nine Months*, p. 272.

been said, the most generally received among Catholic writers of eminence.

The prophecy itself, as it lies before us in the passage of Isaias, includes the element of obscurity and even ignominy of which we speak. For the stem of Jesse is spoken of as having been cut down, almost to the root, and it is but a slender twig or shoot that at first springs up. Then the name Nazarene implies whatever of vileness and meanness in the eyes of the world which may have belonged to it. But from so much insignificance the flower is to come forth, containing in itself beauty, fragrance, fruitfulness. If the name further suggested the great powers and results which were contained in the prophecies in which this image is repeatedly applied to the Messias, it would give a more or less perfect picture and description of our Lord. St. Matthew's use of it would imply that there was foundation in the prophets themselves for what Christians believed as to our Lord, that though humble and lowly in origin and in His dwelling-place, He was to exercise all those mighty powers which were predicted of the Messias.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE HIDDEN LIFE.

St. Luke ii. 40—52; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 15.

When we arrive at the period of our Lord's sojourn on earth which follows immediately on the return from the exile in Egypt, and which extends to the very eve of His Baptism by St. John, we find ourselves tempted to be more than ever bewildered at the silence of the Evangelists, who leave us with but a few verses as the whole chronicle of a number of years which made up by far the largest portion of His Life. Whatever date we may take as that of the termination of the exile, He cannot have settled permanently at Nazareth more than a few years after His Birth. The period of His Public Life and Ministry is fixed for us with reasonable certainty. We know that it began shortly before the first of four annual festivals of the Pasch, at the last of which He was crucified. From our Lord's Birth to the commencement of His Ministry a space of about thirty years is included, and for this we have the direct word of St. Luke. Of these thirty years, therefore, we have no knowledge which relates to any time later than the return from Egypt, except in the few verses of which we are now to speak, and

which we owe to the devout Evangelist St. Luke, who must have received his information, directly or indirectly, from our Blessed Lady herself. There is no part, even of the first chapters of St. Luke, which bears more clear internal evidences than this that it comes directly from her.

This truth may seem in some measure only to enhance the wonder of which we are speaking. It is here again that we are told that "His Mother kept all these words in her heart." The heart and memory of that Blessed Mother were stored with details of the actions and sayings of our Lord during the long period of the Hidden Life at Nazareth. She could have told St. Luke, or him from whom St. Luke had his information, long histories of the peaceful marvels and intense happiness of the Thirty Years, as she has communicated through him to the Church the few verses which describe those years summarily, and which contain the one single narrative of the incident of His visit to the Temple when He was of the age of twelve. It was not, therefore, that materials were wanting, or that the most authoritative witness could not be obtained. It is that we are dealing with the Word of God in Sacred Scripture, divine in its utterances and divine also in its silences. It is that the Evangelists were guided as to what they should omit as well as what they should insert, when to be full and when to be short, when to say the most pregnant truths in a sentence or two, when to lift the veil but half way, as if to show us how much there was which that veil concealed. These things in their fulness are reserved for the endless contemplations of Heaven,

where words are to be heard and truths communicated which belong to that treasury of Divine revelations which now, as St. Paul says, it is not granted to man to utter. But if in their fulness, these things are reserved, it is not that the few points on which we are allowed to feed our souls are not most pregnant and sufficient in themselves. The revelation of the Life at Nazareth as it is made to us in the third Gospel gives us the outlines and principles of the whole, and enables us to see what it was on which our Lord was occupied, and the place which the work, so to say, of these graces filled in the grand design of His Kingdom.

He had, indeed, been occupied in building up His Kingdom from the first moment of His entrance into the world. On Christmas Day He had been acknowledged by the angels as their Lord and King, according to the precept of God of which St. Paul speaks in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The humble shepherds had joined their adoration to that of Mary and Joseph, as representatives of the chosen people. He had gone up into His own Temple, as it were, to take possession of it, and in it He had solemnly offered Himself to His Father for the execution of the great sacrifice on which the Kingdom was to be founded. The holy priest Simeon was there to welcome Him in the name of the hierarchy, the blessed Anna to offer Him the homage of the saintly company to which she belonged. The Lord had come to His Temple. Meanwhile, the visible creation had acknowledged His sovereignty in the miraculous star which woke up in the hearts of the Wise Kings the memory of the ancient pro-

phecies which foretold His coming. The Gentile world was hastening to His feet, to acknowledge Him as God, and King, and Redeemer by the sacrifice of His Sacred Humanity. The Princes, as we have seen, were received by Herod and the priests of Jerusalem. The official witness of the Jewish Church was elicited by their question. When they had laid at His feet the worship of the whole world outside the chosen people, they went on their way to be prepared, by the graces they had received, for a future apostolate and a future martyrdom, which constituted the active service they were to render to the establishment of the Kingdom. Then Herod was let loose in his fury, the reigning King of the Jewish polity, to bear witness by his impotent attempt to stifle the Kingdom to its existence, its power, its crushing might, its invincible and triumphant and everlasting vitality.

In His sojourn in Egypt our Lord had extended still further the foundations of His Kingdom. He had blessed the Jews of the Dispersion, and prepared them by the silent but most efficacious blessing of His presence for the services they were to render Him in coming generations. He had taken possession of the old land in which His ancestors had been sojourners, and left behind Him, in the secret treasury of Providence, the seeds of that marvellous and luxurious fruitfulness of Christian perfection which has spread from the deserts and caves and cities of Egypt over the whole world, which still lives in the Church, and will live in her until the end of the world. For, as has been already said, our Lord's Heart and mind were full from the beginning with

the most intense, though the most tranquil, activity. As long as He was in the world, He was the Light of the world, that is, in Bethlehem, in Egypt, in Nazareth, as well as in Jerusalem, or on the Mount of the Beatitudes.

My Father, He said at Jerusalem, worketh until now, and I also work. The mysteries of His Infancy, like those of all His Life, were full of the most solid and lasting fruit in the Church on earth and in eternity. The sojourn in Egypt was a time for the practice of the most beautiful virtues, the time for suffering of its peculiar kind, for the training of Mary and Joseph, and the like. Looked at with regard to the foundations of His Kingdom, it was, as has been said, the time when the presence of the King consecrated to His service all that was to be hereafter in Egypt itself, and in the Church by inheritance from the spiritual work which was first to be begun in Egypt. The Sacred Heart looked forward to all that in perfect fulness of detail, and we may well suppose that, as He afterwards spent the night in prayer before He selected His Apostles, or when He had worked the great miracle which was the foreshadowing of the Blessed Sacrament, so now His prayers were specially directed to the great work of the laying of the foundations of the ascetic life in the land of His exile.

And now the sojourn in Egypt was at an end, and, as we have seen, the Providence of the Father, working through the prudence of St. Joseph, had determined on the beginning of a new change in the Life of our Lord, the scene and home of which was to be the Galilæan town in which our Blessed Lady

had been born, and in which the great mystery of the Incarnation had taken place. It is natural for us, with the few significant words of St. Luke and St. Matthew before us, to ask ourselves, what was the great work to which our Lord was now to address Himself, what new Kingdom was He to take possession of and to sanctify by His own life-giving presence and contact in this long retirement in a remote corner of Galilee. We can only gather this from the words of the Gospels, which we may well suppose to have been chosen under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, for the purpose of signifying to us, in their eloquent and deep simplicity, the answer to this question. St. Matthew's words imply, as we have seen, if that is not their most direct meaning, that the sojourn at Nazareth was not only obscure, but in a certain sense ignoble. The Evangelist's language, "He shall be called a Nazarene," reminds us of the words of the good Nathanael unto St. John, who came from a neighbouring town, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" We may at least be sure that, if Nazareth was not looked down upon by all its neighbours, it at least shared with the rest of Galilee the contempt of the Jews of Judæa and Jerusalem. Thus the first element in the sojourn at Nazareth is obscurity, hiddenness, and something more or less contemptible in the eyes of the world.

The second feature which meets the eye in the residence at Nazareth is that it had on it the brand of poverty. St. Joseph and our Lady were not mendicants, and probably nowhere in the Holy Land were there to be found, in those days, many

who would now be classed, in our pagan vocabulary, as destitute and "paupers." But their lot was that with which we are happily still familiar, the lot of persons living on a very small property of their own, and supporting themselves, more or less, by labour of their hands. They are the class in Christian communities who have the largest share of the happy contentedness of the true children of God. When their lives are good and pure, they are almost as uniformly joyous as good religious in a community. They are joyous because they truly carry out our Lord's precepts in the Sermon on the Mount, about not taking thought for the morrow, and depending in absolute confidence on the Providence of their Father. God is indeed a Father to them, and supplies all their wants. Where do we find the families who are anxious about the future, about the settlements of their daughters, the professions of their sons, who seek employment and cannot get it, who are always besieging the friends whom they suppose to be able to promote their interests, and scanning advertisement after advertisement in the hope of some opening? Not among the poor of whom we speak, but among those a grade or two above them in social position, the class to an equality with whom the foolish wisdom of the world is always tempting them to endeavour to rise. This is the second feature in the life at Nazareth—honourable poverty and a great dependence on Providence.

In these elements of obscurity and poverty we can already see the immense extent of the Kingdom which our Lord was thus making His own. By far the greater number of mankind are included in the

classes which are thus characterized. Our Lord took the lives, the conditions, the trials, the hardships of all to Himself, and sanctified them thereby, filling them with an almost sacramental grace for the benefit of the millions and millions who were to come after Him therein. Since His time, and by means of the teaching and example of those who have learnt their lesson from Him, obscurity and poverty have become ennobled and honoured as well as sanctified and filled with grace. They have become the paths along which an immense multitude of souls most dear to Him are always walking on their road to high thrones in the heavenly Kingdom. His Life at Nazareth is their consecration, the source of their grace, their consolation in trial, the foundation of their hope and joy. There are two more elements of the same kind to which we must next pass, to find them equally large and rich in blessings for mankind. For His Life in the Holy House was the consecration also of the Christian home with all its mutual charities and ineffable beauties. And as soon as His age permitted, He took to Himself also the life of an artisan, and so hallowed to all time that condition of toil and labour which, in the loving Providence of God, had been mercifully allotted to man after his fall.

We often speak of the holy homes of religious life as the creation of our Lord, for they are, indeed, the visible and living enshrinement of His counsels and His Hidden Life. Without them, it has often been said, the Church would be without any visible institutions in which the life of the great counsels of perfection is set forth before the world. This is

true, and we may have to speak presently of the relation of a part, at least, of the Hidden Life to this special creation of the religious vocation in its most technical sense. But we must never forget that we owe to our Lord's Life at Nazareth the consecration of the Christian home, the domestic life which is the sphere of the millions of the faithful all over the world, in which the husband rules as did St. Joseph, and the wife obeys as did Mary, in which the parents are charged with the holy education of their children, and in which the children fill the place of the Holy Child in their obedience, their growth, and the light as of Heaven which they shed around them.

The home and the family belong to the natural order, and it is on them that the Divine institution of society is founded. Thus, before our Lord came, and from the beginning of time, there were homes and families all over the world, even in the most barbarous countries, and the home and the family had not been altogether corrupted, though they had been terribly degraded and defiled, among those nations of the old world which were considered the most civilized. It has been thought that one of the reasons for the selection of the Greeks and Romans to be the masters of the world, the possessors of the mental culture and social organization on which the Church was engrafted, is to be found in the fact that among them the domestic relations had long been held in honour, and preserved with at least some kind of reverence not to be found elsewhere outside the chosen nation. But the coming of our Lord, and especially the consecration of domestic

life which flows from His long residence at Nazareth, have lifted up and ennobled, and penetrated with a new life and power of grace these relations, to an extent such as to make the Christian home appear almost a new creation.

This is a blessing which flows from the Hidden Life of our Lord, and which is even wider and larger in its range than the consecration of poverty and obscurity. The Kingdom which He has thus made His own is not confined to any one class or condition of human life, not even to them which contain the greatest numbers. It extends over the whole of human society. Its value in His eyes cannot be estimated, nor the amount of beautiful graces which are poured forth daily and hourly upon it, nor the myriads of virtues which it calls into play, nor the heavenly happiness of which it is the shrine. The Christian home is indeed the ante-chamber of Heaven. It is the object of the continual attacks of the enemies of mankind, who can achieve few greater triumphs over the Kingdom which our Lord has founded than when they succeed in polluting marriage, in destroying parental authority, in chilling the charities and duties which bind the child to the father and the mother. No invasion of hordes of barbarians, marching through a flourishing region and laying it waste with fire and sword, is so hateful in its results in the eye of Heaven as a law sanctioning the dissolution of the marriage tie, or tearing the children away from the guardianship and guidance of their parents. All over the world, by the mercy of God, the Christian home was set up by His Church, her fairest creation, her greatest

service to society. And the light and peace and purity and happiness of the Christian home are all derived from the life led by Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in the Holy House.

It is to this period of the Life of our Lord that we also look as the consecration of childhood and youth, the most beautiful portions of the Christian life. Our Lord did very much, during the time of His Public Teaching, to raise the honour of childhood, and to secure for it that reverence of which even the heathen poet could speak. No one was allowed to keep the children from Him, and He made even the natural virtues and characteristics which make childhood so lovely the patterns at which His Apostles were to aim in their practice of virtue and perfect spirituality. He went Himself through all the stages, He practised most perfectly all the duties and humilities and submissions and obediences of this period of human existence. This is the one point concerning Him which has been specially recorded. "The Child grew, and waxed strong, full of wisdom, and the grace of God was in Him." The words seem not to have been written without a particular purpose of showing that, full as He was of all grace and wisdom from the very first, so that in the fullest sense growth either in grace or wisdom was impossible in Him, Who had the plenitude of both from which all receive, still His Life was marked, in the eyes of those around Him, by that continual advance which is the peculiar charm and privilege of that age. Thus He made His Life, in this respect also, the consecration of the stages of human existence through which He chose to pass,

that He might be like us in all things. Thus the children of Christians, all over the world and in all times, have the blessing which He has left behind Him for these happiest years of their life, happy in themselves, and happy, far more truly, in the harvest of manly virtues of which they are the seed-time.

There is, as has been said, another feature in the Hidden Life which becomes prominent after the first years of our Lord's youth are over, and of which especial mention is made later on in the Gospels, though, indeed, its existence might have been divined from what we already knew of the condition of the Holy Family. This feature is, that our Lord not merely learnt a trade, as is said to have been the case with all the Jews, in accordance with which custom we find that St. Paul was a "tent maker," although it is not at all likely that he was brought up to depend on this trade for a livelihood. But our Lord not merely knew the trade of St. Joseph, who was a carpenter, but appears Himself to have been occupied day after day in the labours of the workshop. For manual labour is the ordinary lot of man, it is for most of them a blessed lot, both as the means of an honourable living, and also as requiring in them perforce habits of industry and regularity and independence, all the noble virtues which belong to those who eat their bread in the sweat of their brow. But, in the miserable world into which He had come, the position of the artisan was in most places contemptible.

The detestable system of slavery in the ancient world, which attained its highest proportions under the Roman Empire, sapped the foundations of all

true and healthy social life wherever it prevailed. One of its effects was that a large number of the useful and manual arts fell into the hands of slaves, and thus came to be considered a degradation to the free. Thus the whole artisan class was despised, except among the Jews, and wherever their influence prevailed, and it was one of the great works of the Christian Church for the benefit of society to bring back to manual labour its due honour, thus redeeming from idleness and vice large bodies of men. We find St. Paul, whose work lay mainly among Gentile communities, making it a special point, which he calls his glory, that he frequently supported himself by the labour of his hands, and this at the very time at which he was most actively engaged in the work of the foundation of the Church in one place after another. He may have had many reasons for this, but among them we cannot be mistaken in thinking that the desire to raise the honour of labour in the eyes of Christians was one. We find him more than once vigorous in his denunciation of idleness. "He that will not work," he says, "must not eat." It was just this idleness which was the result of the dishonour of labour of which we are speaking.

But St. Paul would naturally rejoice in the sanction, higher than his own example, which was given to manual labour by the Life of our Lord, for so many years at Nazareth, where He was known as the "carpenter," and the "carpenter's son." When we turn our eyes to the Christian society which has been the creation of the Church, and to the best ages and instances in the history of that society, we find both how powerful and how beneficial in its

influence this example of our Lord has been. In the shop of St. Joseph, and in the holy cottage where they rested after their labours in the company of our Blessed Lady, He must have looked forward with delight to the effect of His example on mankind. The dignity of woman vindicated, her true place in the social system restored to her, the beautiful charities of the Christian home, the honour intended for them by God, the Author of society, given to poverty, humility, labour—these and other effects of the Hidden Life must have delighted His Heart, not only on account of the number of holy virtues which were thus brought within the sphere of the daily life of the Christian, and which filled his soul with grace, securing him immense glories in the Kingdom of Heaven, but also as making earth a foretaste of Heaven, as making the temporary sojourn, from which His children were to pass to their thrones hereafter, a scene and time of happiness inferior only to that of Heaven itself.

Thus we see especially in this Hidden Life of our Lord the marvellous effects of His passage through the world. He came to lead men to Heaven, to teach them that this world has in it nothing that is worthy of their minds and hearts, to wean them altogether from earthly things, to despise the goods and the ills alike which are so soon to pass away. And yet His presence has made earth, for the first time, an abode of happiness. To use a cant expression of our time, He has made life worth living, even in itself. He has founded Christian society on foundations which are strong enough to outlast the world. If the Christian

countries could but mould their social system on the simple principles of Nazareth, we should hear no more of destitution, of inequality, of discontent, of classes that are called dangerous, because their misery forces on them the thought of combining to use their physical strength, to obtain the share which they deem their right in the common heritage of mankind. The remedy for all the social evils under which the world is so continually groaning might be found, not in any violent reorganization of society, but in the return of the family, the home, the community, to the principles of Nazareth. If our Lord had meant His work only for this present world, and not for the future, He could have left behind Him nothing more wisely and tenderly contrived to secure our happiness than the simple example of the Holy Home.

It is in this way, then, that it seems best to sum up the lessons of the Hidden Life. It was the part of our Lord's Life when He taught especially by what He was, rather than by what He said. It was a continuation, also, of that interior life of prayer, adoration, and spiritual activity of which something has been said with reference to His Life in the Womb. It was a continuation of that silent teaching as to the goods and evils of this world which we have considered in His Life in the Crib. It is the mirror of perfect virtue in the domestic life and in the religious life. Above all, it is the consecration of all these departments and conditions of human existence of which we have now been speaking. The mere summary enumeration of them is enough to show us how wide and far-reaching and penetrating

is the influence of this Hidden Life on the lives of Christians, and that it could be as little spared from the range of our Lord's examples and instructions as the Public Ministry and the History of the Passion.

And we must add to these examples and instructions, if we wish to gain even the simplest summary of His work at this time, the formation, which grew under His hand day after day, of the immense sanctity of the souls of Mary and Joseph. Here was indeed a growth and an increase, interior and essential, apparent to the eye of God and not only to the eye of man, which were always proceeding most rapidly, though at times with intensified speed, as the greater mysteries of the Hidden Life succeeded one another. Thus was made up a work, worthy indeed of the Incarnate Son, even if He had had no other occupation for His Wisdom and Power.

CHAPTER XVII.

OUR LORD AT JERUSALEM.

St. Luke ii. 41—50; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 15.

THE general account of the Hidden Life of our Lord which is given to us by St. Luke, is marked, as we all know, by one incident only, of which we are to speak in the present chapter. This must not be considered as a break in the Hidden Life, as if it were anything contrary to or different from the constant tenour of that Life in the eyes of God. On the contrary, it was a feature therein entirely in harmony with the rest, a feature without which the picture of that Life would have been incomplete. It supplies a principle, among those which may be said to be the lessons and examples of our Lord during these Thirty Years, of singular significance and importance. It sets our Lord before us in connection with most important elements in the Christian life of His children, which might otherwise be unrepresented in His example as it is given to us in the Gospels. It lays on that example the foundation of some most vital points of His teaching, some points for which there might have been no room in the Public Life which followed. Thus it adds to and crowns and completes the marvellous

teaching already set before us, not in the words of our Lord, for He did not yet teach by words, but in that holy and perfect example which went before His verbal teaching.

It was the custom of the Jews, in accordance with the prescriptions of the Law, to be present at the three great feasts of the year, the Pasch, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles. It does not seem certain that, at the time of our Lord, all were expected to go up to Jerusalem three times in the year, although that is what the letter of the Law enjoined. Women were not included in the injunction. But it is evident that many pious women were in the habit of frequenting these feasts out of devotion, and it is most probable that our Lady, who had been brought up in the Temple, would be most strongly drawn, by her perfect intelligence of the ways of God and her devotion to sacred places and sacred times, as also by her loving gratitude for all the benefits of His Providence over her people which these festivals commemorated, to take every opportunity offered to her of visiting the Temple at such times.

Mary could thoroughly appreciate the spiritual blessings which were, at such times, poured out profusely on devout worshippers. She could understand, also, as no one else could understand, the immense advantage which accrued to the people from such commemorations, which lifted up their hearts to God in gratitude for the past, which prepared them for future spiritual blessings of a far higher order, which knit them together and to the holy centre of their national life by the constant revival of their faith,

and, at the same time, filled their hearts with that spiritual joy, strength, and holy enthusiasm which are the ordinary fruits of the religious celebration of great festivals frequented by large bodies of devout believers. It must have required a strong necessity to keep our Blessed Lady at home on such occasions.

"And His parents went every year to Jerusalem at the solemn day of the Pasch." We are not told at what age it was usual for children to accompany their parents on these pious pilgrimages, and it is not said by St. Luke that the occasion of which He speaks, in this narrative, was the first on which our Lord had Himself been present. There must have been various customs, in this respect, in various families, for in some it would have been far more convenient to take a child to the feast than to leave him at home alone. And, as our Lord had from the first the fullest intelligence and the most perfect use of all His interior faculties, it must have been a delight to His Sacred Heart both to frequent the Temple and also to accompany His Blessed Mother and St. Joseph when they left their home. It may very well, therefore, be thought that our Lord had gone up on this pilgrimage from the very earliest date of His residence at Nazareth. The mention of the twelfth year of His age, at which time this particular visit was made, is accounted for by the tender care with which His Mother would keep all such memories in her heart, and also by the fact that that age was a kind of turning-point in the adolescence of the Jewish children, who became mature in bodily growth and mental vigour far earlier than

is the case with the inhabitants of more northern climates.

"And when He was twelve years old, they went up to Jerusalem according to the custom of the feast." The Jewish children began to learn the Law at the age of five, that is, certain Psalms and portions of the Books of Moses were taught them at home, and they also were sent to schools where schools existed. They were considered capable of independent obedience to the Law, and of the responsibilities which this capacity involved, at the age of twelve. Thus the incident of which we are about to speak, took place at that point of the youth of our Lord when it was natural for Him to be considered as no longer a Child as to His religious responsibilities and duties. It was not that at twelve the children, to use our language, were supposed to attain the full use of reason, and to be capable of choice between virtue and sin. It was rather that at that age they were to act and choose for themselves, they might settle their plan of life, determine, as we should say, their profession, and the like.

The annual pilgrimages of the devout Galilæans to Jerusalem were probably made in large bodies, the people of two or three neighbouring towns perhaps uniting together. Any one who has been present at one of the great Christian shrines, such as Loreto, at the time of year when pilgrimages are made, may have been struck with the simplicity and beautiful order in which the people arrive, walking in procession two and two, each with his or her staff and a little bundle of clothes or provisions, the men separated from the women, singing pious canticles

and hymns in honour of the Madonna. The Galilæan pilgrims probably walked in some such order, making their way along the Lake of Tiberias till they could cross the Jordan soon after it issues from that lake, descending its valley on the eastern side till they reached the fords opposite Jericho, and then mounting up to Jerusalem by the road mentioned, and often traversed, by our Lord. The younger children might go with either parent, but the boys of such an age as that which our Lord had now reached might be gathered in a company of their own. We may well assume that there was perfect order on the march, as it was an expedition which had to be made so often, year after year. It was a happy occasion on which friends and relatives would meet, and they probably had their well-arranged places of halt and rest on the way, as well as houses in Jerusalem or its neighbourhood to which they would betake themselves during the time of the festival.

Christian contemplatives have often delighted to feed their devotion upon the picture of our Lord as a Child during this pilgrimage. "It is to be believed," says the pious Abbot Aelred, "that the Boy Jesus at that time would have vouchsafed the sweetness of His presence, now to His father and the men who were with him, now to His Mother and the women accompanying her. Let us therefore think how great must have been their happiness, to whom it was given on these days to see His face and hear His honeysweet speech, to consider how in the Man and the Boy there were certain signs that flashed forth of heavenly virtue, the mystery of

wisdom unto salvation making itself known in their mutual discourse. The elders are astonished, the youths are in admiration, and the boys of His own age are overawed by the gravity of His manners and the weightiness of His words. I think that in that most lovely face there was seen to shine so great a charm of heavenly grace, as to draw the gaze of all upon Him, to make all listen to Him, to stir up all to love Him. . . And when all entered the Holy City in this happiness, consider, I pray, how there arose a pious and holy strife between those several families, each of them desiring that His most sweet presence might be granted to them."[1]

On the arrival at Jerusalem the great centre of attraction to the Holy Family would certainly be the Temple, and the sacred services and rites which were carried on there. The pilgrims from Galilee would there be met by thousands of others who had come, not only from other parts of the Holy Land, but from the whole world, over which, as has been said, the Jews were now scattered, often in large and flourishing communities. The long list of nationalities which is given by St. Luke in the Acts in his account of the feast of Pentecost may be taken as representing the collection of the pilgrims on any such great feast. "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, and inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judæa, and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt, and the parts of Lybia about Cyrene, strangers of Rome, Jews also and proselytes, Cretes and Arabians."[2] Although the pre-

[1] Aelred, *Tractatus de Jesu duodenni.* [2] Acts ii. 9—11.

sence of an immense surging multitude may often be most distracting and confusing in its effects on devotion, it is different when the multitude is collected for one common purpose of devotion and united in one great act of worship. And if we were to enter into the Heart of our Lord, He must certainly have rejoiced intensely, and given the most loving thanks to His Father, at the presence of so great a number of souls all bent on the commemoration of the great deliverance which had been wrought of old by a display of power unequalled in the history even of the holy people, but which was to be so far surpassed by the deliverance which He Himself was to work by His own sacrifice on the Cross. In this action of His, therefore, we may see the consecration, to all time, of the devout attendance on festivals and holy functions, whether at places and times of pilgrimage or not, and the endowment by Him of such holy observances with the manifold graces with which they are so often fraught.

As the women and the men worshipped in different parts of the Temple, it is very easy to imagine that our Lord might at one time have been in the company of His Mother and at another in that of St. Joseph, if, indeed, He did not separate Himself altogether from both, and pour out His Heart in adoration and prayer in some spot of the Temple where He could be most retired. He had a great work to do at that very festival, as we shall see in our consideration of the mystery which followed, and it was usual with Him, as we learn from the Gospels, to spend much time in secret prayer on

the eves of such occasions in His Life. But He would hardly need any special work at that particular moment to prompt Him to spend long hours in prayer and supplication at such a time. Even among ourselves, people travel together to a shrine or go together to a church for some great function, but when they are once there, each one follows his own bent, in obedience to the overpowering spirit of devotion and the desire of that union with God which is best attained in the solitude of the heart, even if it must be in the midst of a crowd. Thus the incident which followed might have happened in any ordinary case to one member of a family, though our Lord had His own Divine reasons for every single feature in that incident.

"And when they had fulfilled the days, when they returned, the Child Jesus remained in Jerusalem, and His Parents knew it not. But, thinking that He was in the company, they came a day's journey, and sought Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. And not finding Him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking Him." As the march of the pilgrims was probably well arranged and marshalled, and the conclusion to which our Lady and St. Joseph both came as to the absence of the Holy Child was so natural, they did not break the procession by looking for Him on the way, and thus only discovered their loss when they met at the end of the day's journey. Thus, perhaps, it was divinely ordered that the absence of our Lord should become sooner and more widely known than might otherwise have been the case, and the consternation and fears of the holy pair were speedily communicated,

as well as the fact of their loss. Mary may have been well prepared for a blow of this kind, by the prediction of holy Simeon, and by her own constant meditations thereon. She had had experience of the manner in which the sword of sorrow might find her out at any moment, by the swiftness with which the joy of the Epiphany had been followed by the order to fly into Egypt.

It is true that Archelaus was by this time deposed and banished, and that the Romans had now taken the government into their own hands. But the traditions of Herodian policy were still alive, and it was quite possible that some plot might have been laid to do away with the Holy Child, Whose story could not have been altogether unknown or forgotten. Thus it is not unreasonable to think that our Blessed Lady may have had other grounds for her sorrow and alarm, as well as the mere fact of our Lord's disappearance. Humanly speaking, it might seem, even to her, most unlikely that He had withdrawn Himself deliberately and without any notice to her. The mystery which was now being carried out does not seem to have been revealed to her, in order, perhaps, among other reasons, that her perfect virtue and union with the will of God might have the opportunity of a more searching trial.

"And not finding Him, they returned into Jerusalem, seeking Him. And it came to pass, that after three days they found Him in the Temple, sitting in the midst of the Doctors, hearing them and asking them questions. And all that heard Him were astonished at His wisdom and His

answers." Jerusalem was the place where they had lost Him, and it was only natural to seek for Him there. They would take a day to return to the city, and probably went first to the house at which they had lodged. From this it would appear that our Lord had not spent the night there. They would then betake themselves to the Temple, but they might not think at once of looking for Him in the room or hall which was set apart for the school. In the course of their search, however, they would find their way thither, and all alarm for His safety would be at an end.

The Jewish schools were conducted, as it seems, by some of the Chief Rabbis, though they might not all be present on a particular day. It is said that at this time the famous Hillel was still alive, the father of the Simeon who, as has been said, may have been the person who received our Lord into his arms at the time of the Presentation in the Temple. Hillel must have been in extreme age, nearly a hundred years old. Gamaliel, the son of Simeon, was already in the prime of life, or nearly so. Any of them may have been present at this "catechism" of our Lord. The disciples sat at the feet of the doctors, and the teaching was conducted regularly by the way of question and answer, the children having full liberty to ask as well as being expected to answer questions. Thus it would appear that our Lord put Himself in the place of a learner rather than that of a teacher, and there would have been nothing out of character with His youth in what He did. What was remarkable to all who were present was the clearness of His

intelligence and the penetrating pregnancy of His questions and answers.

The Evangelist does not tell us the subject-matter of the instruction, or of the questions which were put to or by our Lord. What was important in the counsels of God was that He should thus be present in the sacred school, not so much the particular point on which the teaching of that day turned. We may suppose that, as the prophecies and expectations concerning the coming Messias were at that time in the minds and mouths of every one, our Lord may have taken the opportunity to suggest something of this kind, as when, at the very end of His Public Ministry, He asked in the Temple itself, Whose Son Christ was to be, and why David in spirit called Him Lord? But we may look upon this incident of His presence in the Temple, in the first instance, as a sanction and blessing from Him on the whole work of sacred teaching, especially catechetical teaching, which He probably had no opportunity of bestowing at Nazareth. If there was a school there at which He might have been present, His presence could not have given the work of education there carried on so universal and remarkable a sanction as this incident at Jerusalem. It has been said that this incident may be considered as belonging to the normal course of the Hidden Life, rather as breaking it by something which was in contradiction to that course. But in those elements of the Hidden Life which were considered in the last chapter, this one of the sacred school could not find a place, for the reason already explained. There could be no such school anywhere, possessing such

authority, and placed under the guidance of the most learned men of the nation, except in Jerusalem itself.

On the other hand, it is clear in itself, with a clearness which increases in intensity with every generation of the Church, how singular and unique is the importance, in the Kingdom of our Lord, of Christian catechetical teaching. When the Church was as yet making her way and securing her foundations, as in the times of the Apostles, and even in the early centuries, the great work could not be established with the prominence which properly belongs to it. The elements of Christian doctrine were taught by parents to their children, and the day will never come when parents will be relieved from their duty and privilege, as far as it is in their power to supply the needs of their children in this respect. But the great work of the Christian catechism must soon pass from the home and the father's knee to the organized system of the schools of the Church, and we may claim this significant action of our Lord, which is the only act in these thirty years which is specially recorded, as the foundation in His own life of the work of which we speak. And we may consider this, as has been said, was one of the prime reasons why our Lord did this, and why He has ordained that it should be so specially put on record for us, namely, that He might leave the light of His own example, and the blessing which springs from all that He has touched, on the Christian school, as well as on the Christian home and the Christian workshop.

The Church in all ages has numbered the names

of some of her greatest lights among the list of those who have been devoted to the great work of the catechetical instruction of the young. Many more there are, indeed, known only to God, who have spent the best years of their lives in work of this kind, the merit and reward of which correspond to its laboriousness. There is little room in the work of the catechist for brilliancy, for the display of eloquence, for the qualities which ensure applause and renown. That work is, for that reason also, infinitely dear to God and infinitely precious to the Church. Like the evangelizing of poor rustic populations, it has over and over again need of fresh stimulus and of the example of ever-fresh devotion on the part of the saints, to prevent its falling into dishonour and neglect, entrusted to men who get weary of it, and are easily tempted to leave it.

Thus our Lord's example at the age of twelve years has again and again to be enforced. We have again and again to be reminded that His tender loving Heart was not too tender or too loving to leave His Blessed Mother unwarned, for the sake of throwing Himself among the children in the school in the Temple. If the doctors who were teaching there had been marvellously enlightened as to His person and dignity, if they had risen to the full Christian knowledge of Who He was and what He came to do for the salvation of souls, they could not have seen in His presence there a higher motive for devotion to their work than that which every Christian catechist has a full right to claim as his own, when he sees around him

the young innocent souls so dear to our Lord, and has to teach them the holy and blessed truths of His Kingdom, Who said, "Whosoever shall give to drink to one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, Amen, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward."[3] If a cup of cold water is to win a reward, what shall be given to him who ministers to these little souls the saving waters of the faith?

"And seeing Him, they wondered. And His Mother said to Him, Son, why hast Thou done so to us? Behold, Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing. And He said to them, How is it that you sought Me? Did you not know that I must be about the things that are My Father's?" Our Blessed Lady says nothing about any alarms which she may have had on the score of danger. All such thoughts were at once dispelled by the sight of our Lord in the midst of the doctors. Nor, again, does she put any question as to the work on which He was occupied. He was free to choose that or any other work which belonged to His Divine Mission. Nay, she would rejoice in her heart at seeing Him so occupied, and in seeing around Him so many noble souls, men of great learning and repute, yet no one of them worthy, in St. John's words, to unloose the latchet of His shoe. She would be glad to see Him there, to listen to His wonderful words, and to pray that the blessings which were contained in them might take deep root in the hearts of His hearers.

We know that in the life of our Lady, as in the

3 St. Matt. x. 42.

life of the Angels, there was a perpetually recurring occasion for fresh wonder and thanksgiving. To the Angels the Providence of God, the manner in which He rules the world and directs the Church, the work of the Holy Ghost in souls and in meeting the spiritual needs of successive generations, suggest, as they are unrolled before the eyes of those dwellers in Heaven, ever new secrets of His Wisdom and Power which fill their hearts with astonishment. So to Mary the successive mysteries of our Lord's Life, as they fell under her eyes, were the occasions of ever fresh wonder and joy. This was a new manifestation of our Lord, and so her soul and that of St. Joseph were filled with wonder. This is the true spirit of the children of God. There is enough in the ordinary course of life, day after day, to fill us with wonder, if we did but understand how we are to see God in everything, and how to study Him in what is ever passing before our eyes. Wonder, therefore, joyous admiration at this new revelation of Himself, was the first affection of our Blessed Lady's heart at seeing our Lord thus occupied. Her long training in the study of her Son and His actions made her ever ready to fasten on these subjects of wonder. She was informed beforehand of what was to come when that was necessary or opportune. But with a heart and soul like hers, so faithful with its loving homage and admiration, it may have been more glorious to God to leave her to read the lessons, one by one, as they were presented to her. Her intelligence and heart were thus able to act, in many cases, more spontaneously and with a more exquisite perfection.

After her wonder, however, would come the simple motherly question, not why this had been done, but why it had been done without any warning to herself and to St. Joseph. Why had this sorrow been inflicted upon them? It was not so much complaint, as a simple question. Whatever our Lord had done must be right and most perfect, but she did not understand why it had been so done, what was the Divine reason for conduct which was so new and so strange. This is the simple account to be given of this question, which is like other questions asked of our Lord at various times in the way of astonishing inquiry, as when His disciples asked Him why they had been unable to cast the devil out of the lunatic boy, or why the Scribes said that Elias must first come. There was no doubt something in the manner of our Lord's action which required an explanation, and it was the manner, rather than the action itself, which had cost so much sorrow to that Blessed Mother and to St. Joseph. They had had all the pangs of alarm to undergo, for there was always the possibility that He might have been seized in the crowd. There was also, what always rises up in good and holy minds under such circumstances, the fear that they themselves might be to blame for unconscious negligence, or if they had not been to blame, that some accident had happened in consequence of their omission. But the great and overwhelming cause of their sorrow was that our Lord was withdrawn from them, and that their search had been for a long time ineffectual. The search was now soon happily over, and so far all anxiety and sorrow were at an

end. But there still remained the question which our Lady now asked, and we shall find that our Lord's answer throws a wonderful light, not only on that action of His which had occasioned the sorrow of His parents, but also upon the principle which it involved for the instruction and blessing of His Church.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"THE THINGS OF MY FATHER."

St. Luke ii. 49, 50; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 15.

THE account of this mystery of our Lord's remaining in Jerusalem evidently comes to us from our Blessed Lady herself, directly or indirectly. It is, moreover, not only related by her, but it gives her side of the incident. It follows her on her journey to the first resting-place of the pilgrims, it accompanies her on her return to Jerusalem, in her search for our Lord, until at last He is found in the school of the Temple. It tells us of her marvelling, and of her question to her Blessed Son. It concludes by telling us that she and St. Joseph, her companion all through, did not understand the answer which our Lord gave to her question. All is a narrative of what she and St. Joseph did, felt, said, understood. Of course there is the other side to all this, of which we should endeavour, if possible, to divine the features, as far as they are half disclosed to us in the words of our Lord or of the Evangelist. Where was our Lord, all the time when He could not have been in the school? And, above all, how was it that He had done this, that He had separated Himself from Mary and Joseph for the first time, that

He had done this without a word to them, and that, after all, He found something to remark on in their sorrow, as if it need not have been, or at least as if the search need not have been, the remark recorded in the words, "Did you not know that I must be about the things that are My Father's?" Here are several matters which may well occupy our thoughts.

In the first place, as to the occupations of our Lord during this space of time, which may be thought to have been as much as "three days," in the same way as the interval between the Crucifixion and Death of our Lord, on the one hand, and the Resurrection on the other, is said to be such in the Gospels. As to this we are entirely without information, except as to the one point, that He must have been in the school of the Temple for some time before He was there found by His Mother and St. Joseph. Christian contemplatives have here again tried to fill up the picture. He must have passed, it seems, as much as two nights somewhere, and He must have been in want of food and shelter. He does not seem to have had recourse for these to the lodging or house where the Holy Family had dwelt during the feast, because, if that had been so, the people of the house would have been able to give His parents some information concerning Him. He may have passed the night in the open air, as He was so often to do during His Ministry, and if He broke His fast at all, it is probable, as the contemplatives tell us, that He begged a little bread, as so many of the saints have done. Who could help feeling for His lonely and suffering condition, the poverty, homelessness, and hunger of that sweet

and gracious Child? The Temple, with its sacrifices and praises of God, would occupy Him during the hours which He did not give to the school. Perhaps, also, He did now, what some devout souls think He did during the last few days of His stay in Jerusalem before the Ascension—visit and bless the places which His Passion or other incidents of His Life, especially His Resurrection, were to hallow or had already hallowed. If He did this at the later time, He would have had His Apostles with Him. Now, when all the work of His Life was still in the future, He was alone, except for the companies of Angels that always waited on Him. It is at least certain that the time was short, and that many holy occupations may be imagined with which it might have been filled. He may have visited the poor or the sick, or the lepers outside the city, in every case leaving a blessing behind Him, though the time for His miracles of mercy had not yet come.

We may be sure, at least, that one main purpose of His stay in Jerusalem was that of which we have already spoken, that He might consecrate and hallow the work of holy Christian education by His presence in the school, that He might leave, by His presence and example alike, a blessing and a strength and a promise of immense rewards both to the teachers and the taught, that His Church might be for ever able to plead what He had done, as the highest sanction for the inestimable value and dignity which she attaches to that work. Our business, in this chapter, is rather to seek the explanation of the manner in which our Lord had taken this step in advance, towards the taking up of the

great work of the salvation of souls for which He was sent into the world, a work which contained the two parts of the suffering for sin and the enlightenment of the world. The only direct clue that we have to guide us in this matter is contained in our Lord's answer to His Blessed Mother. But we may find other light to guide us, as well as His words here, in the general principle on which we know His Life to have been ordered, that is, the pleasure of His Eternal Father and the special inspiration of the Holy Ghost.

The words of our Lord are not altogether free from ambiguity, on account of the language in which they are conveyed to us. In our own language we should have understood them of different things, if He had said that He was to be in the places belonging to His Father, or among the persons belonging to His Father, or about the work which belonged to His Father. But the Greek words of St. Luke may be understood without difficulty of all these, or rather, of any one of them. In truth, the chief import of the words of our Lord lies in the mention of His Father, and it is of comparatively small importance whether He was to be in His Father's house, or at His Father's work, or among His Father's people. Moreover, the place where He was found, the work on which He was occupied, and the people about Him at the time, may all be said to have belonged in a special way to His Father. Our own translation, "the things of My Father," certainly limits the possible meaning of the words, but it does not exclude altogether any of their significations.

The word "must," which our Lord also uses, is, on the other hand, less ambiguous in the Greek than in our own language. With us it might refer to the past, as well as to the present, as if our Lord had said, "You might have known that I had to be doing the things of My Father." In the original it is in the present, and thus we understand that it refers to the work on which our Lord was at the time actually engaged. "I have to be." Moreover, it is a word which signifies a necessity imposed by a Divine decree or a call of duty, and not simply that which comes from our own choice, or taste and habit, as when we say that a man is sure to be found in some favourite haunt of his own.

When we throw upon these words the light that we can gather concerning our Lord's action from other expressions, of His own or of the Evangelists, which refer to this subject, we are reminded at once that the whole of His Life was a succession of the freest and noblest choices of His own, which were at the same time what we call special and particular "obediences," coming to Him from His Father. When He says, for instance, "I do always the things that please Him," "As My Father hath commanded Me, so do I," "This commandment I have from My Father," and the like, it is signified that He took no step at all without a decree of the Father, though, at the same time, His human will was perfectly free in its action. The answer of our Lord to His Mother may therefore signify this, that wherever He was and whatever He was engaged upon, He was acting under the guidance and direction of His Father. Therefore any alarm about Him

was superfluous, any anxiety about Him was needless, and to search for Him, as if He belonged to them in such a way that they might control or hinder His action, was out of place. Where He was, was where He must be. The Father, Who had entrusted Him to them, might at any time withdraw the trust. But, on the other hand, He was not likely to withdraw Him from them but for reasons of the highest moment, or without letting them understand that their office had ceased. He was safe in His Father's hands, He was bound to be doing His Father's work, and they all too were safe in the hands of the Father. The words therefore contain a tacit reference to the doctrine which our Lord was to inculcate with so much force in the Sermon on the Mount, namely, that His Father always took a most special and tender care of those who laboured for Him. Thus their fears of His Mother and St. Joseph were natural, but needless.

The apparent difficulty has still to be met, that no intimation of this special obedience of our Lord had been made to our Lady or to St. Joseph. He had left them deliberately, without giving them any warning, while at the same time He could not but be conscious that, in doing this, He was exposing them to great anxiety and sorrow. Our Lord could not have done this without a Divine and most forcible reason, and it is probably in this that the great lesson is to be found which we are intended to derive from this mystery. It not only took place as St. Luke tells us, but our Lord has guided St. Luke to select this anecdote for the instruction of the Church in all ages. It is, indeed, the one

selected anecdote of the whole history of the Infancy. Our Lord knew perfectly well the extreme tenderness, the devoted love, of His Mother and St. Joseph. He knew, moreover, that she had been taught, both by the prophecy of Simeon and by experience, that her life was to be the life of a Mother of Sorrows, which were to come, in the greatest measure and intensity, from her witnessing the persecutions raised against Himself, which were to end on Calvary. Therefore He would, in His own infinite tenderness, feel very keenly indeed the infliction of any sorrow upon her. If she was to be crucified, as it were, with Him, her Compassion with Him was to be a continual intensification of His own sufferings. On the other hand, He knew the strength and fortitude of her soul, He knew her perfect conformity to the will of God, and her quick intelligence of the ways of God, and therefore He knew also the pleasure that her sufferings in any particular case would give to His Father, all the merit and power she would acquire thereby. And so He would not flinch whenever it was for the glory of God, from allowing her to suffer, however keenly, for the sake of that glory, her own advance in grace, and the benefit which her example might confer on His Church.

It must also be remembered that it was to be one of the principles of the Gospel Kingdom that, in all matters of the class to which this action of our Lord belonged, the natural authority of parents and masters and rulers was not only not to be allowed to interfere with the Divine will and call, but was not even to be consulted as of right. It may often be very expedient and convenient for parents and

others to know what their children or subjects may be drawn to by the inspiration or call of God. For our Lord's way is to proceed with sweetness and gentleness and tender consideration, even in matters which belong to His supreme dominion over souls and lives. But although this is very often, and even ordinarily, the case, there are many occasions on which it is necessary to act at once on the Divine call, to leave all natural authorities unconsulted, and even to brave their opposition, if any opposition is made. In all matters which concern what we commonly speak of as vocations, whether to the priesthood, or to a life of virginity, or to religion, or to the work of the foreign missions, and the like, this principle has constantly to be acted on, as it has even more commonly to be observed in the case of conversions to the Church, whether in those who are already Christians or not.

This explains much in this incident. When we look to our Lord for guidance in all such matters, we find, in the first instance, that He has set us the example which is contained in this mystery of His Life, at the cost of this pain and sorrow to the heart of His Blessed Mother. It seems as if He could have done this in no other way so well as that which He chose. Some of the commentators on this mystery tell us that He did not warn our Blessed Lady and St. Joseph of what was coming, because they might perhaps have opposed His design. It seems far more likely that He did not warn them for the contrary reason, namely, because they could not have opposed His wish. It would have been perfectly easy for them to wait in Jerusalem as long as was

requisite, and He would then have paid His visit to the sacred school with their full knowledge and consent. That would have saved the pain of Mary, but it would also have impaired the full effect of the action of our Lord. He could never have followed His Father's will against their will, because their will would never have been for a moment in opposition to His doing so. What He could do was to assert His duty to act on the call of His Father without taking any counsel, so St. Paul says, "with flesh and blood," and thus to leave behind Him in the Church for ever the most luminous declaration of the rights of God in all these matters. And thus we see how it was even necessary for His purpose that our Blessed Lady should not, at once, have penetrated the full meaning of what He had done. She could not have suffered if she had understood it, nor could there have been that clear setting forth of the principle which is involved in the mystery which it now contains.

Our Blessed Lady and St. Joseph, the earthly parents of our Lord, as they are called by St. Luke, stood to Him, we must remember, in the same position which Christian parents occupy with regard to their own children. But there seem to be many cases in Christian life in which it was necessary that this position should be clearly one of but limited ...ity. Our Lord had to teach us both sides of ...t doctrine, the doctrine of perfect dutifulness ...ience, and the doctrine also of the para- ...hts of God. His children were to stand in ...is example as to both these heads of duty. ..., during all the thirty years He was a perfect

pattern of childlike obedience and dependence in everything, and this was, as we have seen, one of the great lessons of the Hidden Life which last through all time, and which have to be acted on daily and hourly in all the Christian homes all over the world. It was in harmony with this great boon of our Lord's to us, a boon of grace as well as of example, for His example is full of grace as well as of light, that, during the same period of His life, the time at which such lessons would most naturally be given by Him, He should also begin His teaching on the other point of the independence of His children in all that regards the service and the worship and the work of God. We say that He began this teaching now, because He continued it afterwards. This is the account to be given of the one or two instances which are recorded in the Gospels of His declaration of similar independence of His Mother's authority. He would not interrupt His teaching because His Mother stood without waiting to see Him. He declared that those who should do the will of His Father were His brethren and His sisters and His Mother. He turned away from her the praises of the woman who lifted up her voice out of the crowd, and declared her blessed because her womb had borne Him, and her breasts had given Him suck, preferring rather that those should be praised who heard the Word of God and kept it, of whom, indeed, she was the chie[illegible]n all such occasions it was well that our Lor[illegible]l guard us against any exaggeration even of [illegible]l rights and authority, using His own Mot[illegible]n example, not because there was any poss[illegible]f such an exaggeration on her part, but bec[illegible]

was the one person in the world who could be so used. Nor can we suppose that there was any incident in our Lord's Life which gave greater delight to His Blessed Mother, than this, when at the cost of some tears and pain to her, He established by His own example this great and most fruitful principle of the supreme Fatherhood of God.

Our Lord was hereafter to lay down most pointedly and most explicitly the principle of which we are speaking. "I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's enemies shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me, and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me, is not worthy of Me. And he that taketh not up his cross and followeth Me, is not worthy of Me."[1] It was not our Lord's way to teach or insist upon anything which He had not Himself done, to guide men along a path of thorns which He had not Himself trod. This mystery of the Remaining in the Temple is the one act of His life in which He gives the example of conduct which He had to urge on others in this respect. He was looking to the immediate future, when the preaching of the Gospel would bring home to thousands of souls the duty of giving prompt obedience to Divine calls, at whatever cost. He was soon to call Peter and Andrew, and James, and John, and the rest, and they were to forsake all things, and follow Him. The course of heroic obedience was exacted of hundreds of others before the first years

[1] St. Matt. x. 35—38.

of the Church closed. But not the immediate future only must have been in our Lord's Heart, nor the call only to apostolic work, the teaching of sacred doctrine, and the like. The action of our Lord of which we have been the narrators has been, as it will be to the end of time, the motive, consolation, and direction of thousands of choices, on which the whole perfection of Christian life has been founded and built up.

We can hardly imagine any example of our Lord which has been much more fruitful and salutary in its results than this. It embraces the whole doctrine of religious vocations, which might otherwise have had no direct foundation in His Life. And when we consider in how many cases these vocations have to be fought over, and how many difficulties may be raised against them on the score of the supposed neglect of natural duties which they involve, we see all the tenderness and wisdom of the provision thus made for us by our Lord. Thus it seems that we have a right to say that in His Sacred Infancy He thought of the large portion of the flock of His Church which was to go through something like the separation from those most dear and most near, of which He sets us the example in this mystery of His twelfth year. That portion of the flock of our Lord is certainly not the least dear to His Heart, nor that which has given him the most imperfect service and the most divided devotion. At certain epochs of the history of the Church, it would seem as if all might have been lost to Christian life and civilization, if it had not been for the monastic orders. At other times the great works of missionary and charitable

enterprise have been in great measure their peculiar province. But in all times these institutes have been the chosen home of the most perfect observance of His Counsels, and so of the examples of His own Life. They have been the gardens in which the most rare flowers of sanctity have been nurtured, and the mighty prayers that have risen from them day and night have been the support and defence of His Church. For all this work, as fruitful in our own day as in any other, this blessed mystery of the Remaining in the Temple was the Divinely ordered foundation.

The Evangelist adds, in conclusion, to his account of this mystery, "that they," that is, our Blessed Lady and St. Joseph, "understood not the word that He spoke unto them." This does not seem to mean that they did not understand what He told them, which was, virtually, that He was about the things of His Father. For as to that, they must have been perfectly familiar with the truth, that He was always following the direction and doing the work of His Father. If we may judge from those sayings of our Lord which are recorded of Him in the Gospels, and of which this is the very first, we must conclude that He seldom opened His lips without speaking of His Father. Devotion to His Father was the daily devotion of His Sacred Heart, and, as He Himself said, out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. It is probable, therefore, that whatever He did or said, there was always reference to His Father. It could be no new thought, therefore, to the Blessed Mother or to St. Joseph, that He had left them in order to do something for His Father.

What was strange to them was, as has been said, that He had undertaken this new work for His Father without reference to them, as if it were something new in His devotion, and with which they had nothing to do, something with which they might not have sympathized, and of which it was better therefore to leave them in ignorance.

It has already been said why our Lord may have done this, and if this explanation be true, it is very easy to see that His words would not be at once intelligible to our Lady and her Spouse. They could not understand the Divine reasons why He had acted so independently, nor how the words which He used explained His action. It might have seemed to them that His words gave a full reason for His being where He was, but not for His having left them in ignorance. The connection between obedience to Divine vocations and what might seem to be neglect of natural ties, would become clear to our Blessed Lady in due time, especially when she witnessed the manner in which He called His Apostles to follow Him, and refused to let one, who wished to follow Him, go and bury his father or wish good-bye to his family. But the time for this had not yet come. It was not necessary that any public explanation should now be given. The will of the Father was not that our Lord should remain away from them, but, on the contrary, that He should return with them to their Holy House, to remain as many as eighteen years in the seclusion and obedience of Nazareth. The principle had been enforced, and occasion had been given for that blessing of Christian schools by His presence which was the direct object of our Lord in this

mystery. It is not, therefore, necessary to seek far for explanation of this want of perfect intelligence in our Blessed Lady and St. Joseph. Marvellous as were her gifts, deep as was her insight into the ways and counsels of God, she had not that essential and inherent fulness of all knowledge which belonged to the Sacred Humanity of her Son, Who could be ignorant of nothing, and Whose knowledge could never increase because it was at once and for ever perfect. God delighted especially in the soul of Mary, and the manner in which she grasped one thing after another, each in its proper time and in its proper connection, was one of the chief beauties of her grace and her faithfulness, the fruit of that pondering in her heart which was her characteristic occupation.

CHAPTER XIX.

SUBJECTION AND GROWTH.

St. Luke ii. 50—52; *Vita Vitæ Nostræ*, § 15.

THE Evangelist closes his narrative of the Hidden Life of our Lord with a few short sentences, which cover a period of more than half of the whole sojourn of our Lord upon earth, while at the same time they seem to give, in the designs of God, an account of our Lord's existence during so long a time, which is adequate in its pregnancy for our information and guidance. So marvellous is the power of the simplest language when used under the guidance of the Holy Ghost, that it may be said that the contemplations of the saints on this great part of the history of the Incarnation have never exhausted its meaning, and that the fulness of particular knowledge concerning it which awaits us in Heaven will never go beyond the lines laid down in these few sentences. They must be taken in connection with what has been told us before. As the narrative of the remaining in Jerusalem was not a discordant break in the former statements about the Life at Nazareth, but a record which continued them and threw new light upon them, so also the information which we are now to consider with regard to the

remainder of the Thirty Years grows naturally, in the spiritual order, out of the last narrative on which we have just been occupied, and is not fully understood unless it be considered in connection therewith.

"And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them. And His Mother kept all these words in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and age, and grace with God and with men." Here there are three principal statements, two concerning our Lord, and one concerning our Blessed Lady. It is said, in the first place, that our Lord did not remain any longer separate from His parents, but returned with them to Nazareth, and was subject to them. The kind of life which He had led hitherto in the Holy House was resumed, after the mystery of the Twelfth Year had taken place, after He had remained in Jerusalem, and told His Mother, when she had found Him, that He must be in the things of His Father. In the second place, we are told that His Mother kept all these words, meaning things as well as words, in her heart. This must be considered as in connection with what has just before been said, that she and St. Joseph had not understood the words of our Lord about the things of His Father. Lastly, we are told, as a summary account of all that happened during these eighteen years, that Jesus increased in wisdom and age and grace with God and men. These, therefore, are the three heads of our present consideration.

With regard to the first, it is surely a matter at which we might, at first sight, wonder, that our

Lord, having once separated Himself from our Lady and St. Joseph, and placed Himself in some degree before the eyes of the public by His appearance in the sacred school, should immediately abandon the work which He had begun, and return to His former state of inaction and subjection. It cannot be thought of for a moment that there was any change of plan about this, or that He meant, as people might have said, to give up the things of His Father and again hide Himself at Nazareth, on account of the remonstrances of His Blessed Mother and St. Joseph. Nor can it be imagined for a moment that the blessed pair to whose charge He was committed could have wished for any abandonment of a work begun, any change in a course which was required either by the interests of His Father and by His express command. Neither could our Lord put His hand to the plough, and then turn back, nor could Mary and Joseph wish that He should do so.

It may therefore be reasonably concluded that what was required for the things of His Father by His presence in the school of the Temple had been already accomplished. He had shown His love for, and left His blessing to consecrate the school for ever, as one of the most precious institutions of His Kingdom. It was not His design, or the command of His Father, that He should continue there. His tender age made the display of wisdom which had been seen, most striking in the eyes of all who witnessed it, and the incident remains for ever as a proof of the perfection of His knowledge of Divine things from the very first. So far, it contributes another weapon to the armoury of the Church, which

she can use, and has used, in the refutation of heresies concerning His Person. But He did all things in His Human Life with the most perfect fitness and propriety, and on this account it might have been out of keeping with the spirit which guided Him throughout if He had now taken on Himself the office of Teacher. And, in the second place, as we have seen, the Divine purpose which was to be served by this mystery was also accomplished, for He had shown that His Father's behests were with Him of paramount and exclusive importance, and that it was to be the rule of His Kingdom that father and mother were to be left, were even to be ignored, when there was an occasion of obeying a Divine call. It was not, therefore, in any way inconsistent with the mystery which had taken place, that He should now leave the Temple with His Mother and St. Joseph, and return to Nazareth.

This, however, does not quite exhaust the meaning of the words before us. They do not signify simply, that there was no inconsistency in our Lord's conduct on the two occasions, when He had first left His parents and then gone home with them. The words signify that His action, in the second instance, was a carrying out of the principle which had guided Him in the first, that as "the things of the Father" had been served at first by His remaining in Jerusalem, so now they were to be served by His going down to Nazareth and being subject to His parents. Thus it may be thought that, as the abiding in the Holy City must have been in obedience to a special and particular mandate of His Father, so also the return to Nazareth,

after this incident, must have been the subject also of the same kind of guidance. This throws a new light on the words of the Sacred Text. We cannot doubt that our Lord had been subject to His parents from the very first. He had now reached an age at which He would naturally be expected to exercise somewhat less of childish dependence upon them. But up to the age at which He had now arrived His dependence and subjection were necessary, if He was to live at all like others of the same period of life. It seems, therefore, to be signified to us by the words of the Evangelist, that our Lord now showed a more complete and full subjection to His parents than before. Not that before there had been anything wanting in the perfection of His obedience, but that it had been less remarkable on account of His youth. Moreover, He had just, as it seems, declared most pointedly that He was independent of them. The perfection of His subjection was thus far more conspicuous after the remaining in Jerusalem than it had been before. It had now the character of the freely-chosen subjection of a man, instead of that of the natural submission of a child. It had also the character of being an obedience especially enjoined by God, beyond the natural obedience and subjection which all are to pay to their parents in all lawful matters. It had a consecration of the same kind and nature as that which characterized the mystery which has been considered in the last chapter. The Divine call had then, for a time, taken Him away from His parents without a note of warning. The same Divine call now led Him to His former home, and enjoined on Him the

subjection to His parents of which the Evangelist speaks.

This, perhaps, may furnish us with the reason why it is here again specially mentioned, that our Blessed Lady kept all these words in her heart. The action of our Lord in remaining in Jerusalem had come on her, as it seems, altogether unexpectedly, except that, since the prophecy of Simeon, her life must have been a perpetual preparation for the Cross. When she had questioned Him as to the reason for His leaving them, He had answered her with words which, as we have seen, were not at once intelligible. But Mary knew well that they contained a truth which it was the office of her prudent and loving mind to work out for itself under the guidance of the Holy Ghost. She could compare His words with His acts, and His acts with His words. She would marvel, perhaps, at His accompanying them home now, as much as she had marvelled at His quitting them before. She would take His words about the things of His Father as the interpretation of the one line of conduct, as well as of the other. Thus she might come to see the full wisdom of God, to recognize the degree in which our Lord hung upon the guidance of His Father, which was the principle of His Life, and to see also the bearing of what He had done and what He had said, and what He was now doing, on the great work on which He was at this time engaged, the work of laying the foundations of Christian life in every department, by His own works before He began to teach.

This divinely-appointed subjection of our Lord for so many years after the mystery of which we

have lately been speaking, is certainly one of the most marvellous features in the whole Gospel history. We may consider it, in the first place, as establishing, in the most unquestionable manner, the unique value which is attached to obedience and subjection in the eyes of God. For thirty years the Saviour and Light of the World is engaged in teaching this lesson rather than any other. The world rolls on along its course of wickedness, and injustice, and impiety, the Teacher of the world is present, full of grace and truth, ready to pay the ransom for all its sins, and to make to it the great salutary revelations, for need of which it is perishing before His eyes. But yet He does not speak, or teach, or show His power, or assert His mission, because He must spend thirty years out of the thirty-three in giving this practical example of obedience. His obedience and subjection are rendered, indeed, to the holiest of His creatures, Mary and Joseph. But what is their holiness, what their wisdom, but graces which they have received, in however large a share, from His perfect fulness?

It is no romance of attachment to that blessed home, to those most loving souls, which keeps Him there. For He has just shown to them and to the world that He would not hesitate to leave them at once, and not even to tell them beforehand of His leaving them. The neighbours and kinsfolk and acquaintances among whom the parents had sought for the Blessed Child, must have known of their loss. These may have thought that there had been some reversal in Him of the plan on which He had acted, when He appeared with them once more.

How different are the thoughts of God from the thoughts of men, the ways of God from the ways of men! Our Lord's Life was always the display of the most sublime wisdom of God, and God saw that His own Divine purpose of the salvation and instruction of mankind was better served by this subjection of eighteen years, than by any other possible employment of His time. And this subjection, as has been said, was undertaken by our Lord after He had shown, in the most striking manner, that He was perfectly independent of all human ties of affection in choosing the path He followed.

Obedience is the law and the happiness of Heaven, as it was meant, at the beginning, to be the law and the happiness of earth. Our Lord was to be obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. But His obedience on Mount Calvary, though it was to be the salvation of the world, was not all that was required for the instruction and regulation of life. The obedience and subjection of our daily life were to be founded rather on the thirty years of Nazareth than on the few hours of the Passion. It was during the thirty years that our Lord lived the life of other children and other men, and thus it is on His example at this time that the rules of our daily life are to be framed. Moreover, if we consider the whole immeasurable mass and weight of the sins which He was to expiate on the Cross, the sins which it broke His Heart to contemplate as His own burthen in the Agony of Gethsemani, what was the principle and root of them all, but disobedience? It began with Adam and Eve in Paradise, and since

that time it has been, in its various manifestations, the corruption, the poison, the degradation of all their children. The lesson of obedience was the one necessary medicine for all the ills of human life, and of all the lessons of heavenly or earthly wisdom there is none which so much requires the teaching of example rather than any other. Thus the years of Nazareth would outweigh the rest of our Lord's Life in the fruitfulness of their teaching, as well as in their duration, if they could teach mankind the misery of independence and the rich fertility of the blessings which spring from subjection.

We may suppose that it is not without a design connected with this truth, that the Evangelist passes on to mention the one other point belonging to the history of these years which he subjoins in the next place. He tells us that the characteristic of this time, after the subjection of our Lord, was that it was a time of progress. "Jesus increased in wisdom and age, and in grace with God and men." As is well known, these words are not without theological difficulties, unless they are interpreted in accordance with the teaching of the Church. This text is one of the passages which has a history in Christian literature, because attempts have been made, from time to time, by heretics of various kinds, to fasten on them an untrue meaning. There have also been some among the Fathers who have allowed explanations which others have rejected, although they have deemed them free from the taint of anything heretical. It will not be necessary to go into a history of the interpretations thus referred to. It will be sufficient to state the fundamental truth on the sub-

ject, and then add the explanations which seem most to harmonize with that truth.

To those who believe our Lord to be God, there can be no question as to any increase in Him of Divine wisdom or knowledge. It is very obvious, indeed, that St. Luke is not here speaking of His Divine knowledge, for the increase of which he speaks is in three things, wisdom, age, and grace. The two last must be considered to refer to Him as Man, and therefore the first also. As Man, we must not allow ourselves to affirm that He could increase or did increase in wisdom, in such a sense as that He came to know at any time, after the moment of the Hypostatic Union, anything that He did not know then. We must insist on the same truth with regard to increase in grace. The union of the Divine Person with the Soul of Jesus Christ filled it at once with all grace and all wisdom, as St. John tells us that He dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. From the very first moment the Soul of our Lord had the full use of free will and choice, and so also it had the perfect fulness of grace and of knowledge. It remains, therefore, for us to inquire in what way, consistently with this principle, He can have increased in wisdom and grace, and we must found our interpretation of the words of the Evangelist on what we discover in this matter.

In the first place we find an interpretation which has the authority of several of the Fathers, among others the great theologian St. Gregory of Nazianzus, and St. Jerome. These doctors teach that the increase in wisdom and grace of which St. Luke tells us, consisted in the manifestation, as time went on,

of ever greater wisdom, and ever greater grace. Our Lord could not but show, in His acts and words, the heavenly powers that were in His Soul, and the successive manifestations of these were to those who saw and heard Him a constant increase in wisdom and in grace. It cannot be questioned that this interpretation is in accordance with Catholic theology, and that it is also a very natural commentary on the words of St. Luke, which come, as has so often been said, from His Blessed Mother herself. She must have been divinely enlightened from the very first as to the theology of the Incarnation, and therefore must have known from the first the truth set forth by St. John. But she must have watched with intense and loving adoration the growth of our Lord in all external manifestations of what was in Him, and in speaking of Him and thinking of Him she would naturally have Him before her mind as He was in the eyes of herself and St. Joseph, unfolding ever more and more the endless stores of grace and wisdom which were in Him always, but which were not so much displayed in the earlier stages of His Infancy as in the later, not all so conspicuous in the Boy as in the Man.

We may mention, in the next place, a doctrine common among the scholastic theologians concerning the various kinds of the knowledge of our Lord, and we shall find that we may gain considerably thereby in the intelligence of the text before us. The scholastics, after treating of the knowledge which our Lord possessed as God, and which is the same identical wisdom which is possessed by the Father and the Holy Ghost, divide the knowledge

of His human Soul in three ways. First, there is the knowledge which comes from the intuitive vision of God which His Soul had from the moment of the union. He saw perfectly the Divinity, and in that He saw all created things. This knowledge was full and perfect from the very first, and therefore as to this He could not increase. The second kind of knowledge of the Soul of our Lord was the infused knowledge which it received also at the beginning, and this was perfect in Him at once and admitted of no increase. It differed only from the knowledge of vision in this, that in the knowledge of vision He saw all things in God, and that by His infused knowledge He knew created things in themselves. In neither of these was any defect, any ignorance, possible to Him, and He knew nothing by the infused knowledge which He did not also know by the knowledge of vision.

But there was also a third kind of knowledge possible to Him, indeed, He could not help having it. It was the acquired and experimental knowledge which grew day by day as His Life went on, as His senses were used, as He became acquainted with the world, with men, with the ways of Providence, the conditions and circumstances of human existence. He would not have been like other men if He had not had this, and indeed, it must be thought that He had it in a perfection far greater than that of other men. This perfection would come from the perfection of His Sacred Humanity in all its faculties of intelligence, which would make His experimental knowledge of all around Him grow with a growth of unexampled rapidity. Thus He

knew His Blessed Mother perfectly from the first moment of the Incarnation, and His experimental knowledge of her, acquired by His constant and most loving familiarity with her as her Child and Companion and Lord, could not add anything in the same kind to His infused knowledge. But it would be a knowledge which increased in its own kind day after day. St. John tells us He had no need of knowledge of this kind to put Him on His guard against men, when he says that our Lord did not commit Himself to many who believed on Him on account of His miracles. "But Jesus did not trust Himself unto them, for that He knew all men, and because He needed not that any should give testimony of man, for He knew what was in man."[1] He did not need it, but He had it, and in this certainly there must have been increase and advance, according to the common laws of human nature. St. Paul tells us that He learned obedience from the things that He suffered,[2] and this is often understood of this experimental knowledge. As to the possibility and existence, therefore, of this increase in our Lord's knowledge of this kind, there need be no question. Thus, if it were necessary, we might adopt this interpretation of the text of which we are speaking, for here is certainly a kind of knowledge which is necessarily one that increases daily, and as to which, therefore, it may truly be said that our Lord did increase.

The difficulty about the adoption of this interpretation lies only in the fact that it may not seem likely that St. Luke intended to speak of this kind

[1] St. John ii. 24, 25. [2] Hebrews v. 8.

of increase as one that was manifested before men as well as before God, and it seems natural to think that the words with which the sentence ends are meant to be applied to all the three heads of increase of which mention is made. This, at least, is the difficulty which is raised by the great commentator Toletus. He seems rather here to incline to the interpretation before mentioned, namely, that which places the increase of wisdom in the manifestation of wisdom, and the like, which advanced in beauty and clearness day after day, year after year. This interpretation seems the more natural of the two, when we remember that the account comes to us from the Mother of our Lord, who would naturally watch, as all mothers do, the unfolding of the faculties and the manifestation of the gifts of her Child in His daily life.

The language of the passage before us is the ordinary language of a Christian home, and does not confine itself to the theological truths which relate to the Soul of our Lord. If there could have been any true increase in His case in interior wisdom and grace, that increase would not have fallen under the ken of that Blessed Mother except in its outward manifestations. But we know that in His case there could be no such interior advance, for the reason already given. We must therefore understand the words of that gradual advance from the wisdom of the Boy to the wisdom of the Man and the grace of the Child to the grace of the Man, which was to be seen in His words and actions by the eyes which watched Him so tenderly. And this explanation is all the more natural when we remember that the

advance in age, would in the usual order of things bring with it an advance, not of higher interior wisdom as underlying and manifesting itself in the same actions, but of wisdom and grace as embodied in ever more and more beautiful actions, for the actions and the words which belong to a more mature age advance in intrinsic maturity and beauty. The advance is in the actions themselves, as, for instance, the action of our Lord in remaining behind in the Temple was a higher action than an act of obedience to St. Joseph in the workshop, though the grace and wisdom of Him Who did these two actions were the same in the one case as in the other. In this sense, therefore, the increase here spoken of may be understood.

It is impossible not to be struck with the manner in which these very simple statements concerning the last eighteen years of the Hidden Life have been so framed as to set forth the most precious spiritual doctrine as well as the historical facts. The Hidden Life of our Lord has always been considered in the Church as the foundation, not only of the holy home life of the great mass of Christian families, but also of the religious life, strictly so called, which is founded on the observance of the Evangelical Counsels and consecrated to God by the sacrifice of perpetual vows. We see good reasons for this common opinion in the incidents of the case, especially in the connection between the words of our Lord to His Mother in the Temple and the long years of obedience and subjection which followed. These words seem to tell us that He had from that time a direct call from His

Father, like that which is given ordinarily in the case of what are specifically called vocations, and that that call was obeyed by Him in all that followed afterwards in the cottage at Nazareth, as well as by what He had done in the three days at Jerusalem. Thus, as soon as our Lord came to the age when it is usual to think that a religious vocation is possible, His obedience and subjection to His parents take this new character of a special consecration. They were the obedience and subjection of One Who, if He had been like one of us in all matters, would still have been old enough and sufficiently His own Master to make them a sacrifice to God. But it is in connection with this period of His Life in particular that we have the passage on which we have now been commenting, about His advance in wisdom and grace as well as in age. It can certainly not be thought fanciful if we see in this a significant suggestion of the truth, on which spiritual writers, from St. Gregory downwards, are so fond of dwelling, namely, that a life of subjection and obedience is the most essential condition of advance in wisdom and grace. These words have been the light and consolation of thousands who have followed the Divine call in the life of perfection, and the glory to God and fruitfulness of grace which have been manifested in souls of this class have been the best and the most beautiful commentary on the words of the Evangelist.

Obedience and subjection certainly imply and nurture humility, and where humility is rooted in the soul, and in proportion as it expands, there charity, the queen of all virtues, is necessarily found

to expand also. Again, obedience and subjection subdue that part of the soul which is the most noble, the will, as well as the understanding, and consequently this sacrifice is most meritorious, a sacrifice which is certain to provoke a most generous recompence from God. Again, these virtues place the soul in safety against the attacks of the great concupiscences, which are the great hindrances to perfection. Holy writers on the subject will furnish us with an abundance of such reasons. Thus we see that there is nothing fanciful in the application of these words of St. Luke to the principles of the spiritual life, especially in religion. Taking these mysteries together, we find three things told us of our Lord at this time. In the first place, He obeyed a Divine call, without attending to human ties. In the second place, He made Himself subject and obedient for a long number of years, which carried Him far beyond the dawn of full manhood. In the third place, His Life was such that it could be truly said of Him that this period was a period of great increase in wisdom and grace as well as in age. It is very easy to apply the several stages here set before us to the history of the religious soul, which begins by obedience to a Divine call, goes on to place itself, by a solemn consecration, under the yoke of obedience, and there finds its reward in a continual increase and growth in heavenly wisdom and mature spiritual strength.

CHAPTER XX.

THE DEATH OF ST. JOSEPH.

We have been endeavouring to note how perfectly the Hidden Life of our Blessed Lord at Nazareth has been arranged, in the Providence of the Father, so as to be the foundation and consecration of the lives of Christians of every condition. We can find in it a teaching, an example, a blessing, for every part and detail of our own pilgrimage. We find there the consecration of obscurity, of poverty, of labour, of domestic life, of the obedience to Divine vocations, of religious retirement from the world. We find in that home the principles of parental authority and filial duty, the hallowing of the relations between parents and children, the marriage tie, the rule of the head of the family, the growth in spiritual perfection which is the ordained fruit of subjection. Our Lord hallows our homes, our schools, the occupations of our state of life, as well as the interior life itself which every soul must lead with its Father and its God. He is our pattern in the solemn worship of God in His Temple, as well as in the life of private prayer and intercession, and all other interior exercises whatsoever. All the features and elements, then, of human life are here in principle;

we can never stray beyond the bounds of the consecration of all which has been imparted by the presence of the Incarnate Son of God. The Scripture records of this time are drawn up in the simplest and shortest words, and yet, in what they tell us and in what they imply, they fulfil thus perfectly what we require. The beauties of that daily life of our Lord with His Mother and St. Joseph no human tongue could tell, no human heart conceive. What was necessary for us was, just that knowledge of its principal lines and features which enables us to look to it in all our daily needs and efforts to carry out the law of God in our own lives.

Perhaps, it may be said, that one great element of human life has been hitherto absent from the description. Human life is not all sunshine, peace, and happiness, in the company of those whom we love. There has, indeed, been suffering and sorrow in the life of the Holy Family up to this. There has been the suffering of hardship, poverty, persecution, danger, exile. There has been the perpetual anticipation of the Cross, and the occasional sharp presence of the Cross. Especially the three days of our Lord's separation from His Mother must have fallen, in an intensity of pain, upon a heart already schooled to expect the sword. But, on the whole, the sufferings, of which we have heard, are removed from the ordinary range of those pains which most inevitably come into the most peaceful lives, and which fill a large part in lives which are not exceptionally tranquil and unruffled in their serenity. Above all, we have not yet heard of that great visitation which, some time or other, must come to shatter the

home, to take away the main support and joy of the family, to make us feel that no earthly happiness can be permanent, no tenderest love without separation. We have not heard of death as an element of life.

Among all the mercies of God and of all the triumphs of religion over the work of sin in the world, there is none by which a natural evil has been turned into a more exquisite and fruitful occasion of good than death, as it has become in the hands of our Lord. Death is but the execution of a sentence passed on sin, which became an hereditary debt to God's justice which all the children of Adam have to pay. Death is the end of all things in this world, sorrows or joys, prosperity or adversity, happiness or misery. It has been kept in the new Kingdom which our Lord has founded, as a decree not reversed, but made the occasion of immense good, a condition which cannot be taken away without altering the whole tenour of our existence, the whole system of human life. It belongs to a large class of physical evils and needs, all of which have been, more or less, touched, sanctified, made fruitful of blessing by our Lord. It is in this class the noblest specimen of this sanctifying and beautifying action of our Lord. St. Paul tells us that "the enemy, death, shall be destroyed last."[1] It is kept, not merely as an enemy who is used as an executioner, but as an enemy who has been turned into a friend, and made the instrument and channel of the highest and tenderest beneficence of the King Who has conquered him.

Certainly, the examples and blessings of the Hidden Life might be thought to be incomplete, if

[1] 1 Cor. xv. 26.

they did not contain the consecration of death, and in that, the consecration of all the natural sufferings and sorrows which find their highest expression and consummation in death. The extreme reserve of the Gospels does not mention the presence of this consecration among the mysteries of the Hidden Life in direct words. But we know that death visited that Holy House at some point of time before our Lord went forth on the work of His Public Life. We may reasonably conjecture that it was not long before His Baptism, but at that time we find Him evidently without the companionship of him who had been given to Him by God as an earthly father. Our Lady is a widow when she first meets us in this part of the history, and we are thus made aware that she and our Lord must have had the experience of the sharpest pang of which our human lives are capable. It must have been a sorrow which our dull hearts and cold affections can only appreciate most imperfectly. As we cannot doubt that this feature also in the Hidden Life is meant for our help and instruction, we may well devote the last considerations in this history to the subject of the death of St. Joseph.

The true joys and sorrows of human life are felt more keenly, in proportion as the hearts on which they fall are more perfect, more pure, more full of Divine and human charity. It is true that any advance in perfection, any growth in grace and virtue, any increase of union with God, enables us to receive the blows which His Providence inflicts on us with greater patience, resignation, thankfulness, and joy. But this truth is not in the least a contradiction to the other, that the best hearts are the

most tender, the most loving, the most sensitive, the hearts capable of the deepest sorrows as well as of the highest fortitude in sustaining them. Thus, in thinking of the effects of the death of St. Joseph on the Hearts of our Lord and His Blessed Mother, we must lay down, in the first place, that we can hardly appreciate them much more fully than we can appreciate the sorrows of our Lady at the Cross and the reflection of those sorrows in the Heart of our Lord Himself. The companionship of St. Joseph and our Blessed Lady had lasted nearly the whole of her life. It was the most perfect conceivable union of hearts, full of every grace and intelligence, burning with Divine love, and knit together by the tenderest ties of affection of which human nature is capable, strengthened and compacted by lives spent, in the most perfect sympathy, on the most ennobling and engrossing object of devotion to the service of God, in the highest work that was ever committed to creatures. If all the loves in the world could be multiplied and intensified in the highest degree, purged of all possible imperfections, and then kindled anew in the furnace of the charities of Heaven, they would not transcend in their strength and beauty the love of Mary for Joseph and the love of Joseph for Mary. This would be true, if they had lived together alone. But we know well that this was not the case. The presence of a child always intensifies the mutual love of parents, and in this case the Child Who added this fresh depth and tenderness to their love was our Lord Himself.

For thirty years our Lord had been living with them as the bond of their mutual love, the object of all

their care and tenderness, and their love one for the other in Him and for Him was ever mounting higher day after day. It was indeed, as it has been called, a Heaven upon earth in which they lived, the tranquillity and deep calm of Heaven making possible intensities of love and joy in one another which earth alone could not have borne. Such was the love, fruitful in a oneness rather than a union of hearts and minds and souls and lives which could have no parallel among created affections, which was now to bear the intense pang of separation at the command of God, and to bear it with such a perfection of conformity and joy as to make the act of separation the most meritorious point in all its history. We shall know only in Heaven what Joseph was to Mary and Mary to Joseph. It is enough now to know that in that ocean of sorrow there were depths which no hearts but their own could ever sound. As their love was, such was their sorrow.

It stands to reason that what is thus true about the intensity of affection between our Lady and her most chaste Spouse, is also true of the love by which our Blessed Lord and His holy father were knit together. To have brought our Lord up, to have been allowed to caress Him as an Infant and a Child, to have had the blessed responsibility of labouring for Him, of being His Guardian and Protector, charged with the care of His life and the support of His existence, of His defence against danger, of His guidance as a boy, a child, a young man, must have given this blessed Patriarch opportunities of knowing the loveliness of His character, and of receiving from Him confidences and familiar and

intimate revelations of Himself, which must have kindled an intelligent devotion to His Person which could be compared only to that of the Blessed Mother herself. St. Joseph was bound by all the obligations of nature to love our Lord as well as our Blessed Lady, and his great sanctity as well as his extraordinary opportunities must have added to all natural affections the intensity of heavenly charity. Our Lord's love to him was also, in the first instance, founded on the natural ties between them, then on the decree of the Eternal Father by which St. Joseph was made, in a certain sense, His own representative and legate, then, again, on the immense love which Mary bore to her Spouse, and lastly in the many years of most intimate and affectionate intercourse, a continual stream of fresh obligations, most powerful over so grateful a Heart as His, for the services of His earthly father and the heroic virtues which he was continually displaying. All these considerations help to make us see how truly the Holy House of Nazareth was a home in which mutual affections attained their utmost height. It was a home of silence, of prayer, of work, of patience, of the interior life, but it was pre-eminently also a home of the tenderest love.

The famous Spanish contemplative, Maria de Agreda, whose work on the Life of our Blessed Lady cannot be taken as anything less than the devout musings of a most highly favoured soul, and by many would be placed on a higher level of authority, has some beautiful thoughts in connection with the subject of which we are speaking. She tells us that several years before the conclusion of the Hidden Life at Nazareth St. Joseph's strength began to fail. It was

not on account of old age, for this writer makes him only sixty when he died, and at the time of which she speaks he is represented as not long past fifty. But his life had been a very hard one, in the way of anxiety, care, and labour for the support of the Holy Family, and thus he became old before his time. The Providence of God permitted him to suffer much rom various diseases, and these prevented him from labouring as he was wont at his trade. This gave our Lady the opportunity of devoting herself more than ever to attendance on him, and to labour, such as she could herself perform, for his sustenance. She prayed him to rest, and let her work. His tools even were given away in alms, that there might be no superfluities in the Holy House. From that time, as far as his maladies allowed him, he gave himself exclusively to the exercises of the interior life, prayer, contemplation, meditation, and he drank in with immense devotion the blessed examples and conversation of his Spouse and her Divine Son. They tended him and waited on him with the utmost care. Thus there was a continual holy rivalry between them in humility, mutual reverence, love, and gratitude.

In this way, then, it was, according to this holy contemplative, that that common dispensation of suffering in health and all the opportunities of patience and charity which it brings with it, found a place in the Holy House for a considerable number of years. St. Joseph was visited with many most painful maladies, giving him wonderful occasions of patience and resignation, while, on the other hand, his life became so continual an exercise in Divine love that he may be said to have suffered more from

that than from his bodily pains. His body was, indeed, almost worn away. He became extremely weak, and yet, by the grace of God, he was able to profit to the utmost by the sweet and fruitful discipline to which he was subjected. Our Blessed Lady was allowed to understand the secrets of his soul, and to delight in and thank God for his simplicity and purity, his patience and gentleness under suffering, without asking for any relief or consolation. Our Lady was able to understand all this, and she laboured with all the force of her soul to wait on him and help him. Maria de Agreda tells us that for the three last years of his life she seldom left him, and our Lord was always with him and her when His work permitted.

The contemplative to whom we have referred describes particularly the farewells which passed between our Lady and St. Joseph, and our Blessed Lord and St. Joseph. He died, it is said, in the eighth year after his strength had first failed. He died in the arms of our Lord, with our Blessed Lady praying by his side. Our Lord thanked him and blessed him, and sent him as His own forerunner to the holy Patriarchs and Saints in Limbus, to announce to them that their salvation was near at hand. The pains and fears of death were made sweet and peaceful by the presence and blessing of our Lord. But it must be remembered that the death of St. Joseph was, in one respect, entirely unique in its sufferings and sacrifice. For Heaven was not as yet opened by the Death of our Lord. St. Joseph could only go, in perfect resignation and submission, to the company of the ancient saints, to

his forefathers and the prophets and saints of the ancient Synagogue, whereas he left behind him what he had enjoyed so long, the company of Jesus and Mary, in itself a more happy and heavenly conversation than any that could await him in the other world. In that sense, at least, death was a loss, a suffering, a kind of martyrdom to St. Joseph, and this consideration must not be forgotten when we estimate the magnificent opportunities of merit of the highest kind which a departure such as this afforded him.

St. Bernardine tells us in his Sermons that there were some Divine reasons why it was arranged that St. Joseph should not live to witness the Preaching of our Lord, and especially the Sacred Passion. One of these reasons, he says, was that he might be spared the immense suffering which it would have cost him to be present at the Passion. We may enlarge a little on the hint given to us by the saint of Siena. To have been living during the Public Life of our Lord could not but have exposed St. Joseph to endless anxieties and vexations. His soul was worn out with the troubles which he had to go through during the Sacred Infancy. The years at Nazareth were more calm and peaceful, but, as we have seen, they were not left without their peculiar mystery of suffering in the three days of the loss of our Lord. But if he had been living when the Preaching had begun, it is hardly possible but that he must have been made the object of every kind of persecution, besides that he would have felt so keenly all that was done against our Lord. Perhaps, too, it might not have been well,

either that it should become rooted in the minds of the people that our Lord had one living who was called His earthly father, or that, on the other hand, St. Joseph should have had to give, before the Passion and the Resurrection, that witness to the truth of our Lady's virginal conception which is recorded for us in the opening chapters of St. Matthew's Gospel. That might have led to fresh vexations and persecutions, in which our Blessed Lady as well as St. Joseph might have been involved.

It was better, therefore, that this great truth should have been left to the witness of the Church, and to avoid any premature discussion of it, it was well that St. Joseph could not be interrogated by the enemies of our Lord. His work was done when the Hidden Life drew near to its close. It is the way of Providence to give one work to one saint, another to another, as we see eminently in the case of St. John Baptist. Humanly speaking, no one could have made a better Apostle, no one could have been antecedently more fit to be the very chief of Apostles, than St. John. But when his particular office was discharged in the few months of his ministry, he was laid aside, to pass into the abode of the ancient saints with the crown of a martyr. We see something of the same rule of God's action with regard to St. Joseph, and what St. Bernardine says of him may be very true. His heart had only grown in tenderness by his long experience of the loveliness of our Lord's character and conversation. Keenly as he was grieved at Bethlehem and in Egypt, he would have felt far more keenly the immense pangs

which would have weighed on his heart had he lived to see our Lord's treatment at Jerusalem.

St. Bernardine, in the passage to which we have referred, adds another reason for the removal of St. Joseph before the Passion. It is that the privilege of the most sublime faith at that time might be reserved to our Blessed Lady alone. This implies that the Saint thinks that our Lord might let the Apostles forsake Him and even totter, as far as they did totter, in their faith, but that He could not have allowed this in St. Joseph. But, as this privilege was reserved to our Blessed Lady, it was well that St. Joseph should not be there to share it with her. Whatever may be thought of this contemplation of St. Bernardine, we may consider, putting the question in a different way, that our Lady might well have been removed from this life before she would have to undergo all that intense suffering which was hers at the time of the Passion, but that it was the design of God that she should have the ineffable and incalculable merit which accrued to her alike from her suffering and her faith, each alike incomparable, and that she should also have all the glory and the power which correspond to that incalculable merit. This glory and this power were to be hers alone, and so St. Joseph was not kept alive that he might share the same cross. In truth, it is far more natural for us to seek for an explanation of the fact that our Lady survived to the time of the Passion, than for the fact of the removal of St. Joseph before that time. The true answer is that indicated by St. Bernardine. In the designs of God the Compassion of Mary was only next in import-

ance to the Passion of her Son, and this truth, when once thoroughly mastered, is the foundation of a very great part of what we practically believe as to the office and power of our Blessed Lady. It explains the position of Mary not only at the Cross, but on the Day of Pentecost, and also her long survival in the early years of the Church. She had a work to do, an office to exercise, a power to employ, and these, while they added so immensely to her already almost unlimited graces and perfections, were included in the prophecy of the sword, delivered by holy Simeon, and placed her at the very beginning of the life of the Church in the place which she has ever since held.

The truth seems to be that the arrangement of the lives, both of our Blessed Lady and of her holy Spouse, was ordered by God with a special view, among other things, to the position and office which each was to occupy in the kingdom of the Incarnation. For the great position of our Blessed Lady it was convenient that she should go through the whole of the Passion by the side of our Lord, ministering to His Sacred Heart the perpetual consolation of her presence, sharing, in truth, as far as that was possible, in the Passion itself, so that she might win a more perfect crown and exercise more fittingly the immense power given to her over the application of the fruits of the Redemption then wrought. Another decree of God's Providence, the same in kind and purpose, was carried out in her detention on earth so many years after the Ascension of her Son. St. Joseph's life may be considered as having been arranged in the same way and with

the same intention, that it might be the fitting foundation of his peculiar glory and of the office which he was to hold in the heavenly kingdom.

We find, indeed, in the life of St. Joseph the foundation of all the great offices, if we may so speak of them, which he discharges in the Kingdom of our Lord. Their greatness is the more remarkable, as in the earliest ages the existence of heresies concerning our Lord's Person, some of which made Him a mere man, born in the ordinary way, was a powerful reason to the Church against putting St. Joseph prominently forward. Another reason perhaps was that, dying before the Passion, he seemed partly to belong to the Old Testament. But still, there was his life recorded, however briefly, in the Gospels. It is enough to be the foundation of all that the very latest ages have learnt to consider his due honour. Our own days have witnessed the solemn decree by which he has been declared Patron of the Catholic Church. This is a reflection of that office of his which we have been studying in these pages, the office of the Head of the Holy Family. And the declaration has come in days when the Catholic Church, the earthly family of our Lord, is being reduced once more to a state of comparative weakness and indigence, by the attitude of Christian States which owe all their life and vigour to her.

Another devout instinct of Christians has made St. Joseph the Father of many of the missions to the heathen. This office of his is a kind of echo of the mission which he discharged so faithfully, of carrying our Lord while an Infant into the heathen land of Egypt, and thus introducing Him to a new

kingdom over which He was afterwards to reign. Again, we recognize St. Joseph as the Father of all Christian families, and this also has come about at a time when the spirit of the world has been busy at work to sap the foundations of the Christian home, by the gradual destruction of the traditions and customs which spring from Nazareth. He is also the special Father of religious communities, and in this we see a continuation of that holy rule and protection which was vested in him as the Provider and Guardian of the Holy Family, which is the foundation of the homes of the religious life as well as of the homes of ordinary Christians. And the constant recurrence to him in the temporal needs of these communities, is founded on the work at which he so faithfully laboured for the support in temporal matters of our Lord and His Mother. This again is connected with another office of his, which places under his care a very large portion of Christian society. For he is recognized as the Patron and Protector of the Christian artisan, of Christian labour of every kind. Here, too, his Patronage has come to be understood at a time when un-Christian doctrines about labour and its rights are propagated with extreme activity and with no slight success.

There remain at least four other offices of St. Joseph, as to which it is easy to see how they are the natural growth of what he had to do and pass through in his divinely arranged course of life. He is the especial guide and helper of souls in the spiritual life, having been himself so perfectly docile to the leading hand of God. He is a special helper

in spiritual difficulties and trials, having passed so faithfully through his own great trial, and through the many other difficulties by which his life was from time to time beset. He is the great teacher of love and true devotion to our Lord and His Blessed Mother, having been occupied all his life in the continual exercise of that love and that devotion. He was no priest himself, but he had to touch and handle and bear about our Lord, and thus he has the power of helping the priests of the Church in the discharge of their holy functions. And then, finally, to return to the point from which we began in this chapter, he is our aid and guide and help in bodily infirmities, and especially in all the duties and privileges of a holy death, because, as has been said, he had to die so holily and to make so perfect a sacrifice of himself to the decrees of God in that respect. Happy, indeed, are those Christians who understand the power and prerogatives of this blessed Patron, and who make of them, for the glory of God and the benefit of their own souls, the use which God intends when He gives them that intelligence!

Thus we may see by what a beautiful disposition of Providence, it was that in his person the discipline of sickness, bodily weakness, the long suffering of the languors and pains by which death is often preceded, lasting sometimes through many years, was introduced into the Hidden Life and the Holy Family at Nazareth. St. Joseph was thus to be raised finally to that great height of interior perfection to which he was destined. The pains and lingering discomforts of the sick bed would not so fitly find

a place in our Lord, or in His Blessed Mother. For we do not read that He ever suffered from disease of any kind, and she, by a special privilege, did not inherit the slightest taint of that original sin by means of which it is that death and all the diseases which lead on to death were introduced into the world. She died, indeed, that she might be perfectly like her Son, but in the strictest sense of the word, death had no right to touch her life. But it would have been a great loss indeed to Christians if they could not find, in that Life at Nazareth, the presence of all this immense department of suffering, if there had been there no patient invalid to look to for an example, no constant exercise of all the delicate charities which find their home in the care of the sick, and if there had been there no example of the holiest of death-beds, securing to them not only a perfect example of how they are to seek to die, but also the most powerful of patrons to assist them when their own last hour is hastening on. All this we find in St. Joseph, who thus becomes, by a most intelligible right, the father of holy dying, as well as so great an example and guide and patron in the exercise of holy living. It is a part of the tenderest compassion of our Lord that He should thus have provided for us in closing the life of this most blessed father before He went forth Himself to preach and to teach and to die.

What, in all its details, that death-bed of St. Joseph was, is one of the secrets of Heaven. We know that he was in the charge of Jesus and Mary. We know that the Mother of our Lord was there with all her power of intercession, in all the devoted-

ness of a love which has never been equalled on earth, with all the compassion for suffering and heavenly wisdom in relieving it which were the fruits of her daily study of the Sacred Heart, as well as of her own incomparable graces. The chosen saints of God have sometimes been favoured, at the time of their death, with the visits of Mary, and a moment's glimpse of her has wakened up in them a joy strong enough to cause their death. Mary was by the side of Joseph, not in any passing vision, but in the most constant companionship for all the years of his suffering as well as at the last moment. And our Lord was there also, with a love deeper, an assistance more powerful and sweeter, even than the love and assistance of Mary. St. Joseph must have died in His arms, in the very arms which were to be spread out upon the Cross, to win from His Father all the blessings of redemption, all graces, all crowns for the children of men. St. Joseph died with his head on that Sacred Heart which was to be pierced by the lance, and to pour forth the Blood and Water which are the life and power of the Church. We hope that when we come to die, we may, if such be the disposition of Providence, have the full use of our faculties, perfect faith, hope, love and contrition, resignation, union with our Lord, the sacraments of the Church, and her final blessing. All these St. Joseph had either actually or virtually, for where our Lord was in Person, there was the living fountain of sacramental grace as well as of all other blessings. We hope for the prayers of Mary, and Mary was there to pray for the soul dearest to her of all, after our Lord. All we can

desire, therefore, is that we may die in the dispositions of St. Joseph and with all those blessings to aid us which St. Joseph had. We try to make him the guide of our life, the father of our souls in all their relations to Jesus and Mary, which he discharged so perfectly. And God has also given him to us as the most blessed and powerful guide and protector in our last passage, which we trust is to lead us to that heavenly home, of which the cottage at Nazareth was the image and the anticipation.

NOTE A.

The Brethren of our Lord (See p. 13).

The following extract from the *Life of our Life*, vol. i. p. 316, may be useful to those who wish to have at hand the Scriptural statements on the Brethren of our Lord.

It may perhaps be as well to add here a few words as to the persons who in this and other passages in the Gospels are called our Lord's Brethren. It is certainly quite superfluous to explain to Catholics that they cannot have been His brothers in the common and full sense of the term. It so happens that a simple inspection of the statements of the New Testament concerning them is enough to place this beyond a doubt to any fair mind. The Helvidian or even the Ebionite ideas on the subject, which find favour with Protestant critics, can only do so because any idea that tends to lower our Blessed Lady, and, through her, our Lord Himself,

presents itself to their minds as something to be instinctively caught at. The New Testament statements, when taken all together, are so clearly against such notions, that it requires the assistance of prejudice to set them aside. It will be enough, therefore, to enumerate these statements, and draw from them the simple conclusion which enables us to see who the "Brethren" of our Lord were.

The places in which the "Brethren of our Lord" are mentioned are these—

St. Matt. xiii. 54—56; St. Mark vi. 2, 3. The townsfolk of Nazareth say, "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not His Mother called Mary? and His brethren, James and Joses and Simon and Judas? and His sisters, are they not all with us?"

St. Matt. xii. 46—50; St. Mark iii. 31—35; St. Luke viii. 19—21. Our Lord's "Mother and Brethren" desire to see Him.

St. John ii. 12. Our Lord goes to Capharnaum with His Mother and Brethren.

St. John vii. 3—10. Our Lord's Brethren urge Him to show Himself to the world. St. John says they did not believe in Him.

Acts i. 12—14. Our Lord's Brethren are mentioned with our Blessed Lady and the holy women as joining the Apostles in prayer.

1 Cor. ix. 5. St. Paul mentions "the Brethren of our Lord and Cephas" as persons of high authority in the Church.

Gal. i. 19. He says "other of the Apostles I saw none, save James the brother of the Lord."

St. Jude 1. "Jude the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James."

Acts xv. 13. St. James proposes the decree of the Council at Jerusalem.

Gal. ii. 9. "James, and Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars."

Thus we have four "brothers," James, Joses, or Joseph, Simon, and Jude. One of them, James, is mentioned as an Apostle by St. Paul, another of the Apostles, Jude, speaks of himself as the brother of James.

Besides these statements, we have the following as to their mother—

"Mary the mother of James and Joses" (St. Matt. xxvii. 56; St. Mark xv. 40).

"Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses" (St. Matt. xxvii. 56; St. Mark xv. 40).

"Mary the mother of James" (St. Mark xvi. 1; St. Luke xxiv. 10).

"Mary the mother of Joses" (St. Mark xv. 47).

All these places refer to the same person, who stood by the Cross with our Lady and St. Mary Magdalene, and is spoken of in the accounts of the Resurrection as "the other Mary," *i.e.*, other than Mary Magdalene. St. John calls her the "sister," of our Blessed Lady, and Mary of Cleophas (*i.e.*, his wife or daughter). Now the "James" mentioned by St. Paul and in the Acts cannot be James the Son of Zebedee, who was the first Apostle to be martyred. But this James was an Apostle. He must therefore have been James the son of Alphæus—which is the same name as Cleophas. St. Jude is his brother, and is called in two catalogues of the Apostles Thaddæus and Lebbæus, probably because the name of Judas was avoided because it was the name of the traitor.

Thus, of the four "brethren" who are attributed to our Lord by the Nazarenes in the Gospel, we find James, Joses, and Judas directly stated to be the children of Mary the wife of Alphæus, or of Alphæus

himself, and Simon or Symeon put in close connection with them. He is never called the son of Mary, and may perhaps have been the son of Cleophas by a former wife, or the son of some other person who was a relative of our Blessed Lady or St. Joseph. The same may perhaps have been the case with St. Jude, who, as well as Simon and James, was an Apostle. The other brother, Joses, is thought by some to have been the same who was surnamed Barsabas, and who is mentioned as one proposed for the Apostolate when St. Matthias was elected. The history of St. James is particularly interesting, as he filled a very important place in the early Church; but it belongs more properly to a volume on the Acts of the Apostles. The difficulty about our Lord's "brethren" who did not believe in Him, as St. John says, speaking of the time before the last feast of Tabernacles, is easily explained. St. John uses the words "believe in Him" in a very strong sense, implying a full belief in our Lord's Divinity. Moreover, as these "brethren" were in truth our Lord's cousins—only two of them, perhaps, really cousins in our sense of the term, as Simon and Jude may have been children of Cleophas by a former wife, not by Mary, the sister (or cousin) of our Lady—there may have been many more whose names are not preserved to us who may have stood in the same relationship to Him and to His Blessed Mother, who may have been called by the same general name. The word "brethren" really means no more than our word "kinsfolk."

HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS.

PART I.

The Holy Infancy.

§ 8.—*The Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

St. Luke ii. 1—7.

(1) And it came to pass that in those days there went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that the whole world should be enrolled. (2) This enrolling was first done by Cyrinus, the governor of Syria. (3) And all went to be enrolled, every one into his own city. (4) And Joseph also went up from Galilee out of the city of Nazareth into Judæa, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of

St. Luke ii. 5, 7.

David, (5) to be enrolled with Mary his espoused wife, who was with child.

(6) And it came to pass, that when they were there, her days were accomplished, that she should be delivered. (7) And she brought forth her first-born Son, and wrapped Him up in swaddling clothes, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

§ 9.—*The Shepherds.*

St. Luke ii. 8—20.

(8) And there were in the same country shep-

St. Luke ii. 9—15.

herds watching and keeping the night-watches over their flock. (9) And, behold, an Angel of the Lord stood by them, and the brightness of God shone about them, and they feared with a great fear.

(10) And the Angel said to them, Fear not, for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, that shall be to all the people: (11) for this day is born to you a Saviour, Who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David. (12) And this shall be a sign unto you, you shall find the Infant wrapped in swaddling clothes, and laid in a manger. (13) And suddenly there was with the Angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, (14) Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will.

15) And it came to pass,

St. Luke ii. 16—20.

that after the Angels departed from them into Heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us go over to Bethlehem, and let us see this word that is come to pass, which the Lord hath showed to us. (16) And they came with haste, and they found Mary and Joseph, and the Infant lying in a manger. (17) And seeing, they understood of the word that had been spoken to them concerning this Child. (18) And all they that heard wondered, and at those things that were told them by the shepherds.

(19) But Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart.

(20) And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God, for all the things they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them.

§ 10.—*The Circumcision. The Name of Jesus.*

St. Luke ii. 21.

(21) And after eight days were accomplished, that the Child should be circumcised, His Name was called Jesus, which was called by the Angel, before He was conceived in the womb.

§ 11.—*The Purification of our Lady, and Presentation of the Child Jesus.*

St. Luke ii. 22—39.

(22) And after the days of her Purification, according to the law of Moses, were accomplished, they carried Him to Jerusalem, to present Him to the Lord. (23) As it is written in the law of the Lord.[1] That every male opening the womb shall be called holy to the Lord: (24) and to offer a sacrifice, according as it is written in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle doves, or two young pigeons.

St. Luke ii. 25—30.

(25) And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon, and this man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Ghost was in him. (26) And he had received an answer from the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord. (27) And he came by the Spirit into the temple. And when His parents brought in the Child Jesus, to do for Him according to the custom of the law, (28) he also took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said:

(29) Now Thou dost dismiss Thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word, in peace:

(30) Because my eyes have seen Thy salvation,

[1] Exodus xiii. 2; Levit. v. 11.

St. Luke ii. 31—37.

(31) Which Thou hast prepared, before the face of all people:

(32) A light to the revelation of the gentiles, and the glory of Thy people of Israel.

(33) And His Father and Mother were wondering at these things, which were spoken concerning Him.

(34) And Simeon blessed them, and said to Mary His Mother: Behold, this Child is set for the ruin, and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted, (35) and thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed.

(36) And there was a prophetess called Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was far advanced in years, and had lived with her husband seven years from her virginity. (37) And

St. Luke ii. 38, 39.

she was a widow until fourscore and four years, who departed not from the temple, by fastings and prayers serving night and day. (38) Now she, at the same hour, coming in, gave praise to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all that looked for the redemption of Israel.

(39) And after they had performed all things according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city Nazareth.

§ 12.—*The Three Wise Kings.*

St. Matt. ii. 1—12.

(1) Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Juda, in the days of King Herod, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, (2) Where is He that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen His star in the east,

St. Matt. ii. 3, 8.

and we are come to adore Him.

(3) And Herod the King hearing this, was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. (4) And assembling together all the chief priests and the Scribes of the people, he inquired of them where Christ should be born. (5) But they said to him, In Bethlehem of Juda: for so it is written by the prophet. (6) And thou, Bethlehem, the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come forth the Ruler, Who shall rule My people Israel.[2]

(7) Then Herod, privately calling the wise men, inquired of them diligently the time of the star's appearing to them. (8) And sending them into Bethlehem, said, Go, and search diligently after the Child,

St, Matt. ii. 9—12.

and when you have found Him, bring me word again, that I also may come and adore Him.

(9) And when they had heard the King, they went their way, and behold, the star, which they had seen in the east, went before them, until it came and stood over where the Child was. (10) And, seeing the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. (11) And going into the house, they found the Child with Mary His Mother, and falling down, they adored Him, and opening their treasures, they offered to Him gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

(12) And having received an answer in sleep, that they should not return to Herod, they went back another way into their own country.

3 Michaes v. 2.

§ 13.—*The Flight into Egypt. The Massacre of the Innocents.*

St. Matt. ii. 13—18.

(13) And when they were departed, behold, an Angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph, saying, Arise, and take the Child and His Mother, and fly into Egypt, and be there until I shall tell thee. For it will come to pass that Herod will seek the Child, to destroy Him.

(14) Who rising up, took the Child and His Mother by night, and retired into Egypt. (15) And he was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which the Lord spoke by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my Son.[3]

(16) Then Herod perceiving that he was deluded by the wise men, was exceeding angry, and sending, killed all the men-

St. Matt. ii. 17, 18.

children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the confines thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men. (17) Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremias the prophet, saying: (18) A voice in Rama was heard, lamentation and great mourning, Rachel bewailing her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.[4]

§ 14.—*The Return from Egypt.*

St. Matt. ii. 19—23.

(19) Now Herod being dead, behold, an Angel of the Lord appeared in sleep to Joseph in Egypt, saying: (20) Rise and take the Child and His Mother, and go into the land of Israel, for they are dead, who sought the life of the

3 Osee xi. 1.

4 Jerem. xxvi. 15.

St. Matt. ii. 21—23.

Child. (21) Who, rising up, took the Child and His Mother, and came into the land of Israel. (22) But hearing that Archelaus reigned in Judæa in the room of Herod his father, he was afraid to go thither, and being warned in sleep, he retired into the parts of Galilee. (23) And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled, what was said by the prophets, that He shall be called a Nazarene.

§ 15.—*The Child Jesus remains in Jerusalem.*

St. Luke ii. 40—52.

(40) And the Child grew, and waxed strong, full of wisdom, and the grace of God was in Him.

(41) And His parents went every year to Jerusalem, at the solemn day of the pasch. (42) And when He was twelve years old,

St. Luke ii. 43—48.

they went up to Jerusalem, according to the custom of the feast. (43) And after they had fulfilled the days, when they returned, the Child Jesus remained in Jerusalem, and His parents knew it not. (44) And thinking that He was in the company, they came a day's journey, and sought Him among their kinsfolks and acquaintance. (45) And not finding Him, they returned into Jerusalem, seeking Him. (46) And it came to pass, that after three days they found Him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, hearing them, and asking them questions. (47) And all that heard Him were astonished at His wisdom and His answers.

(48) And seeing Him, they wondered. And His Mother said to Him, Son, why hast Thou done so to us? behold, Thy father

St. Luke ii. 49, 50.

and I have sought Thee sorrowing. (49) And He said to them: How is it that you sought Me? did you not know that I must be about the things that are My Father's? (50) And they understood not the word that He spoke unto

St. Luke ii. 51, 52.

them. (51) And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them. And His Mother kept all these words in her heart. (52) And Jesus increased in wisdom, and age, and grace with God and men.

98011

DOES NOT CIRCULATE

BT 310 .C65x

Bible. N.T.

The thirty years ;

Bapst Library
Boston College
Chestnut Hill, Mass. 02167